THE IRISH NUNS AT YPRES

AN EPISODE OF THE WAR

BY

D. M. C.

O.S.B. (MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY)

EDITED BY

R. BARRY O'BRIEN, LL.D

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

JOHN REDMOND, M.P.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THE following narrative was originally intended, as a record of the events it relates, for the use of the Community only. But, shortly after the arrival of the Mother Prioress in England, the manuscript was placed in my hands. I soon formed the opinion that it deserved a larger circulation. My friend Reginald Smith shared this view, and so the story has come before the public.

It is in truth a human document of thrilling interest, and will, I believe, make an abiding contribution to the history of this world-wide war. D. M. C., though a novice in literary work, describes with graphic force the transactions in which she and her Sisters played so conspicuous and so courageous a part. The moving pictures, which pass before our eyes in her pages, are full of touching realism, and throw curious sidelights on the manifold aspects of the titanic struggle which comes home to everyone and everything.

The heroism, the self-devotion, the religious faith, the Christian zeal and charity of those Irish nuns at Ypres, in a terrible crisis in the history of their Order, will, I venture to say, command universal respect and admiration, mingled with pity for their fate, and an earnest desire, among all generous souls, to help them in retrieving their fortunes.

A Note by the Prioress, and an Introduction by Mr. Redmond, who, amid his many onerous occupations, is not unmindful of the duty which Irishmen owe to the historic little Community of Irish Nuns at Ypres, form a foreword to a narrative which belongs to the history of the times.

The illustration on the cover is a reproduction of the remnant (still preserved in the Convent) of one of the flags captured by the Irish Brigade at the battle of Ramillies. On this subject I have added a Note in the text.

PREFACE

There are names in Belgium which revive memories that Irishmen cannot forget. Fontenoy and Landen are household words. Ypres, too, brings back recollections associated with deeds which mark the devotion of the Irish people to Faith and Fatherland.

R. BARRY O'BRIEN.

100 SINCLAIR ROAD,
KENSINGTON, W.
May 1915.

NOTE BY PRIORESS

THESE simple notes, destined at first for the intimacy of our Abbey, we now publish (through the intervention of Mr. Barry O'Brien) to satisfy the numerous demands of friends, who, owing to the horrors of the fighting round Ypres, have shown great interest in our welfare.

Owing, also, to the numerous articles about us, appearing daily in the newspapers—and which, to say the least, are often very exaggerated—I have charged Dame M. Columban to give a detailed account of all that has befallen the Community, since the coming of the Germans to Ypres till our safe arrival at Oulton Abbey. I can therefore certify that all that is in this little book, taken from the notes which several of the nuns had kept, is perfectly true, and only a simple narrative of our own personal experiences of the War.

NOTE BY PRIORESS

May this account, to which Mr. Redmond has done us the honour of writing an introduction at the request of Dame Teresa, his niece, bring us some little help towards the rebuilding of our beloved and historic monastery, which, this very year, should celebrate its 250th anniversary.

M. MAURA, O.S.B.,
Prioress.

April 1915.

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE been asked to write an introduction to this book, but I feel that I can add little to its intense dramatic interest.

Ypres has been one of the chief centres of the terrible struggle which is now proceeding on the Continent, and it is well known that this same old Flemish town has figured again and again in the bloody contests of the past.

It may, perhaps, be well to explain, in a few words, how the tide of war has once more rolled to this old-world city.

On Sunday, June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his wife, the Duchess of Hohenberg, were assassinated. Although it was known throughout Europe that there was in existence in Serbia an anti-Austrian conspiracy (not of a very formidable character), and although suspicion pointed towards the assassinations being due in some way to the influence of this conspiracy, no one dreamt for a moment that the tragedy which had occurred would have serious European consequences; and, as a matter of fact, it was not until July 23 that the Austro-Hungarian Government presented an ultimatum to Serbia. On that day, however, a note of a most extraordinary and menacing character was delivered to the Serbian Government by Austria-Hungary. It contained no less than ten separate demands, including the suppression of newspapers and literature; the disappearance of all nationalist societies; the reorganisation of Government schools; wholesale dismissal of officers from the army; and an extraordinary demand that Austro-Hungarian officials should have a share in all judicial proceedings in Serbia; besides the arrest of certain specified men, and the prevention of all traffic in arms.

It at once became evident to the whole world that no nation could possibly agree to these demands and maintain a semblance of national independence; and, when it was found that the ultimatum required a reply within forty-eight hours, it became clear that the whole of Europe was on the brink of a volcano.

Great Britain, through Sir Edward Grey, had already urged Serbia to show moderation and conciliation in her attitude towards Austria-Hungary; and, when the ultimatum was submitted to her, Great Britain and Russia both urged upon her the necessity of a moderate and conciliatory answer.

As a matter of fact, Serbia agreed to every one of the demands in the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum, with only two reservations, and on these she proposed to submit the questions in dispute to The Hague. Serbia received no reply from Austria-Hungary; and, immediately on the expiration of the forty-eight hours, the Austro-Hungarian Minister quitted Belgrade. During those forty-eight hours, Great Britain and Russia had urged (1) that the time-limit for the ultimatum should be extended, and that Germany should join in this demand; but Germany refused. Sir Edward Grey then proposed (2) that Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy should act together, both in Austria-Hungary and in Russia, in favour of peace. Italy agreed; France agreed; Russia agreed; but Germany again held back. Sir Edward Grey then proposed (3) that the German, Italian, and French Ambassadors should meet him in London. Italy and France agreed; Russia raised no objection; but Germany refused.

On July 29, the German Imperial Chancellor made to the British Ambassador in Berlin the extraordinary and historic proposal that Great Britain should remain neutral, provided that Germany undertook not to invade Holland, and to content herself with seizing the colonies of France, and further promised that, if Belgium remained passive and allowed German troops to violate her neutrality by marching through Belgium into France, no territory would be taken from her. The only possible answer was returned by Great Britain in the rejection of what Mr. Asquith called ‘an infamous proposal.’

On July 31, the British Government demanded from the German and French Governments an undertaking, in accordance with treaty obligations, to respect Belgium’s neutrality, and demanded from the Belgian Government an undertaking to uphold it. France at once gave the necessary undertaking, as did Belgium. Germany made no reply whatever, and from that moment war was inevitable.

On Monday, August 3, the solemn treaty, guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium, signed by Germany as well as by France and Great Britain, was treated as ‘a scrap of paper,’ to be thrown into the waste-paper basket by Germany; Belgian territory was invaded by German troops; and, on the next day, Tuesday, August 4, German troops attacked Liège. From August 4 to August 15, Liège, under its heroic commander, General Leman, barred the advance of the German armies, and, in all human probability, saved Paris and France and the liberties of Europe.

On August 17, the Belgian Government withdrew from Brussels to Antwerp. On August 20, Brussels was occupied by the Germans. On August 24, Namur was stormed. On August 25, Louvain was destroyed, and, after weeks of bloody warfare, after the retreat from Mons to the Marne, and the victorious counter-attack which drove the Germans back across the Aisne and to their present line of defence, Antwerp was occupied by the Germans on the 9th of October. On October 11, what may be called the battle of Ypres began in real earnest; but the town, defended by the Allies, held heroically out; and by November 20, the utter failure of the attempt of the Germans to break through towards Calais by the Ypres route was acknowledged by everyone.

During the interval, Ypres was probably the centre of the most terrible fighting in the War. This delightful old Flemish town, with its magnificent cathedral and its unique

Cloth Hall, probably the finest specimen of Gothic architecture in Europe, was wantonly bombarded day and night. The Germans have failed to capture the old city; but they have laid it in ruins.

The following pages show the sufferings and heroism of the present members of a little community of Irish nuns, which

> 'The world forgetting, by the world forgot,'

has existed in Ypres since the days, some two hundred and fifty years ago, when their Royal Abbey was first established. It is true that, during those centuries, Ypres has more than once been subjected to bombardment and attack, and, more than once, Les Dames Irlandaises of the Royal Benedictine Abbey of Ypres have been subjected to suffering and danger. But never before were they driven from their home and shelter.

Why, it may be asked, is there a little community of Irish Benedictine nuns at Ypres? During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, three English ladies—Lady Percy, with Lady Montague, Lady Fortescue and others—wishing to become Religious, and being unable to do so in their own country, assembled at Brussels and founded an English House of the ancient Order of St. Benedict. Their numbers increasing, they made affiliations at Ghent, Dunkerque, and Pontoise.

In the year 1665, the Vicar-General of Ghent was made the Bishop of Ypres, and he founded there a Benedictine Abbey, with the Lady Marina Beaumont as its first Lady Abbess. In the year 1682, on the death of the first Lady Abbess, Lady Flavia Cary was chosen as the first Irish Lady Abbess of what was intended to be at that date, and what has remained down to the present day, an Irish community. At that time, the Irish had no other place for Religious in Flanders. A legal donation and concession of the house of Ypres was made in favour of the Irish nation, and was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception under the title of 'Gratia Dei.' Irish nuns from other houses were sent to Ypres to form the first Irish community. From that day to this, there have been only two Lady Abbesses of Ypres who have not been Irish, and the community has always been, so far as the vast majority of its members are concerned, composed of Irish ladies.

Its history,[1] which has recently been published, contains the names of the various Lady Abbesses. They are, practically, all Irish, with the familiar names Butler, O'Bryan, Ryan, Mandeville, Dalton, Lynch, and so on.

In 1687, James II of England desired the Lady Abbess of the day, Lady Joseph Butler, to come over from Ypres to Dublin and to found an Abbey there under the denomination of 'His Majesty's Chief Royal Abbey.' In 1688, the Lady Abbess, accompanied by some others of the community at Ypres, arrived in Dublin, and established the Abbey in Big Ship Street, leaving the House at Ypres in the charge of other members of the community. It is recorded that, when passing through London, she was received by the Queen, at Whitehall, in the habit of her Order, which had not been seen there since the Reformation. In Dublin, James II received her, and granted her a Royal Patent, giving the community ‘house, rent, postage’ free, and an annuity of £100. This Royal Patent, with the Great Seal of the Kingdom, was in the custody of the nuns at Ypres when this War began. It was dated June 5, 1689.

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[1] *The Irish Dames of Ypres.* By the Rev. Dom Patrick Nolan, O.S.B.

When William III arrived in Dublin, in 1690, he gave permission to the Lady Abbess, Lady Butler, to remain. But she and her nuns refused, saying ‘they would not live under a usurper.’ William then gave her a pass to Flanders, and this particular letter was also amongst the treasures at Ypres when the War broke out.

Notwithstanding William’s free pass, the Irish Abbey in Dublin was broken into and pillaged by the soldiery, and it was with difficulty that the Sisters and the Lady Abbess made their way, after long and perilous journeys, home to their House at Ypres. They brought with them many relics from Dublin, including some old oak furniture, which was used in the Abbey at Ypres up to the recent flight of the community.

And so the Irish Abbey at Ypres has held its ground, with varying fortunes. In January, 1793, forty or fifty armed soldiers broke into the Abbey ; but the Lady Abbess of the day went to Tournai to seek aid from the General-in-Chief, who was an Irishman. He withdrew the troops from the Convent. The following year, however, Ypres was besieged by the French ; but, although the city was damaged, the Convent, almost miraculously, escaped without injury.

An order for the suppression of Convents was issued in the very height of the Revolution. The heroic Lady Abbess Lynch died. She was succeeded by her sister, Dame Bernard Lynch, and the Community were ordered to leave. They were, however, prevented from so doing by a violent storm which broke over the town, and next day there was a change of government, and the Irish Dames and the Irish Abbey were allowed to remain, and, for several years the Irish Abbey was the only Convent of any Order existing in the Low Countries.[1]

So it has remained on to the present day, from the year 1682 down to 1915, when, for the first time during that long period, this little Irish community has been driven from Ypres and its Convent laid in ruins.

Amongst the other relics and antiquities treasured by the Community at Ypres, at the opening of this war, was the famous flag, so often spoken of in song and story, captured by the Irish Brigade in the service of France at the battle of Ramillies; a voluminous correspondence with James II; a large border of lace worked by Mary Stuart; a large painted portrait of James II, presented by him to the Abbey; a church vestment made of gold horse-trappings of James II; another vestment made from the dress of the Duchess Isabella, representing the King of Spain in the Netherlands; and a number of other most valuable relics of the past.

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[1] At the time of the Revolution, the nuns of Brussels and Dunkerque (to which Pontoise had been united) and Ghent fled to England, and these three Houses are now represented by Bergholt Abbey (Brussels), Teignmouth (Dunkerque), and Oulton Abbey (Ghent).

All these particulars can be verified by reference to the Rev. Dom Patrick Nolan's valuable history.

This little community is now in exile in England. Their Abbey and beautiful church are in ruins. Some of their precious relics are believed to be in places of safety. But most of their property has been destroyed. They escaped, it is true, with their lives. But what is their future to be ? Surely Irishmen, to whom the subject especially appeals, and English sympathisers who appreciate courage and fortitude, will sincerely desire to help those devoted and heroic nuns to go back to Ypres—the home of the Community for over two centuries—to rebuild their Abbey and reopen their schools, to continue in their honourable mission of charity and benevolence, and to resume that work of education in which their Order has been so long and so successfully engaged.

JOHN E. REDMOND.

April 1915.

CONTENTS

CHAP. PAGE
PREFACE v
NOTE BY PRIORESS ix
INTRODUCTION xi
I. THE COMING OF THE GERMANS . . 1
II. THE ALLIES IN YPRES 14
III. INCIDENTS OF THE STRUGGLE . . 24
IV. IN THE CELLARS 47
V. THE BOMBARDMENT 70
VI. FLIGHT 92
VII. VISITING THE WOUNDED . . . 107
VIII. AN ATTEMPT TO REVISIT YPRES . . 128
IX. PREPARING TO START FOR ENGLAND . 137
X. A SECOND ATTEMPT TO REVISIT YPRES 143
XI. THE RETURN JOURNEY TO POPERINGHE 157
XII. ON THE WAY TO ENGLAND . . . 171
XIII. OULTON 192

ILLUSTRATIONS

OULTON AND YPRES . . . . *Frontispiece*

The Lady Abbess of Oulton, The Lady Abbess of Ypres, The Mother Prioress of Ypres.

THE IRISH DAMES OF YPRES . . *To face p.* 48

D. Patrick, D. Columban, D. Bernard, D. Teresa, D. Walburge, D. Placid, Mother Prioress, D. Aloysius.

THE MOTHER PRIORESS, DAME TERESA, AND THE THREE NUNS WHO REVISITED YPRES . . . . ,, 144

THE IRISH NUNS AT YPRES

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THE GERMANS

THE War, with all its horrors, into which the Emperor of Germany plunged the world in August 1914, had been raging nearly six weeks, when, towards the end of September, vague rumours of the enemy's approach reached us at Ypres. Several villages in the neighbourhood had had visits from the dreaded Uhlans, and, according to report, more than one prisoner had avowed that they were on their way to Ypres. An aeroplane had even been sent from Ghent to survey the town, but had lost its way. In these circumstances, the burgomaster sent round word that from henceforward, until further orders, no strong lights should be seen from the outside, and no bells should be rung from six in the evening till the following day. Consequently, when night came on, the Monastery remained in darkness, each nun contenting herself with the minimum of light; and a few strokes of a little hand-bell summoned the community to hours of regular observance, instead of the well-known sound of the belfry-bell, which had, for so many years, fearlessly made known each succeeding hour. Another result of the burgomaster's notice was that we were no longer able to say the office in the choir, as on one side the windows looked on the street, and on the other to the garden, the light being thus clearly visible from the ramparts. We, therefore, said compline and matins, first in the work-room, and afterwards in the chapter-house, placing a double set of curtains on the windows to prevent the least little glimmer of light from being seen from the outside.

An uneasy feeling of uncertainty took possession of the town. This feeling increased as news reached us, in the first days of October, that the enemy had been seen several times in the neighbourhood.

At length, on October 7—a never-to-be-forgotten day for all those then at Ypres—a German aeroplane passed over the town, and shortly afterwards, at about 1.30 P.M., everyone was startled by the sound of firing at no great distance. In the Monastery, it was the spiritual-reading hour, so we were not able to communicate our fears; but, instead of receding, the sound came nearer, till, at 2 o'clock, the shots from the guns literally made the house shake. Unable to surmise the cause of this sudden invasion, we went our way, trying to reassure ourselves as best we could. Shortly after vespers the sound of the little bell called us all together, and Reverend Mother Prioress announced to us, to our great dismay, that what we had feared had now taken place—the Germans were in the town. Some poor persons, who came daily to the Abbey to receive soup, had hastened to bring the dreadful tidings on hearing the bell ring for vespers, because an order had been issued (of which we were totally ignorant) that no bells might be rung, for fear of exciting suspicion. The poor, often more unselfish and kind-hearted than the rich, showed themselves truly so on this occasion, being more anxious for our safety than their own—one poor woman offering her little house as a shelter for Lady Abbess. She had only one penny for all her fortune, but still she was sure that everything would be well all the same; for, as she wisely remarked, the Germans were less likely to think of pillaging her bare rooms than our splendid monastery.

The cannonading which we had heard at 1.30 was a gallant defence made by 100 Belgian police, who had been obliged to retreat before the 15,000 Germans, who, from 2 till 8 P.M., poured slowly into the affrighted town, chanting a lugubrious war-song. M. Colaert, the burgomaster, and the principal men were obliged to present themselves. It was arranged that the town would be spared on the payment of 75,000 francs, and on condition that no further violence should be offered. M. Colaert and another gentleman were kept as hostages.

We looked at one another in consternation. We might then, at any moment, expect a visit, and what a visit! What if they were to come to ask lodgings for the night? We dared not refuse them. What if they ransacked the house? . . . Would they touch our beloved Lady Abbess, who, owing to a stroke she had had two years before, remained now partially paralysed? . . . We instinctively turned our steps to the choir. There, Mother Prioress began the rosary and, with all the fervour of our souls, an ardent cry mounted to the throne of the Mother of Mercy, 'Pray for us now, and at the hour of our death.' Was that hour about to strike? . . . After the rosary, we recommended ourselves to the endless bounty of the Sacred Heart, the Protector of our Monastery, 'Cœur Sacré de Jésus, j'ai confiance en Vous.' And putting all our confidence in the double protection of our Divine Spouse and His Immaculate Mother, we awaited the issue of events.

Our old servant-man Edmund—an honest, a fearless, and a reliable retainer, with certainly a comical side to his character—soon came in with news. Prompted by a natural curiosity, he had gone out late in the afternoon to see the troops; for the Germans, as in so many other towns, made an immense parade on entering Ypres. For six long hours they defiled in perfect order before the gazing multitude, who, although terrified, could not repress their desire to see such an unwonted spectacle. Following the army came huge guns, and cars of ammunition and provisions without end. The troops proceeded to the post office, where they demanded money from the safes. The Belgian officials stated that, owing to the troubled times, no great sum was kept there, and produced 200 francs (the rest having been previously hidden). The railway station had also to suffer, the telegraph and telephone wires being all cut; while four German soldiers, posted at the corners of the public square, and relieved at regular intervals, armed with loaded revolvers, struck terror into the unfortunate inhabitants of Ypres. After some time, however, the most courageous ventured to open conversation with the invaders—amongst the others Edmund, who, coming across a soldier, more affable-looking than the rest, accosted him. The German, only too glad to seize the opportunity, replied civilly enough, and the two were soon in full conversation. ‘ You seem to be in great numbers here.’—‘ Oh ! this is nothing compared to the rest ! Germany is still full—we have millions waiting to come ! We are sure to win, the French are only cowards ! ’ ‘ Where are you going to when you leave Ypres ? ’—‘ To Calais ! ’ ‘ And then ? ’—‘ To London ! ’ ‘ Ha-ha-ha ! You won’t get there as easy as you think, they’ll never let you in ! ’—‘ We can always get there in our Zeppelins.’ . . . With this the German turned on his heel and tramped off.

It was now time to think of finding lodgings for the night. A great number of horses were put in the waiting-rooms at the station, destroying all the cushions and furniture. The soldiers demanded shelter in whatever house they pleased, and no one dared refuse them anything. Our Abbey, thanks to Divine Providence, of whose favour we were to receive so many evident proofs during the next two months, was spared from these unwelcome visitors—not one approached the house, and we had nothing to complain of but the want of bread. Our baker, being on the way to the convent with the loaves, was met by some German soldiers, who immediately laid hands on his cart, and emptied its contents. We therefore hastily made some soda-scones for supper, which, though not of the best, were nevertheless palatable. However, all did not escape so easily as we did, and many were the tales told of that dreadful night. The most anxious of all were those who were actually housing wounded Belgian soldiers! If they were discovered, would the brave fellows not be killed there and then? And it happened, in more than one case, that they escaped by the merest chance. Before the convent of exiled French nuns, Rue de Lille, whom we were afterwards to meet at our stay at Poperinghe, and where at that moment numbers of Belgians were hidden, a German stopped a lady, who was luckily a great friend of the nuns, and asked if there were any wounded there. 'That is not a hospital,' she replied, 'but only a school'; and with a tone of assurance she added, 'If you do not believe me, you can go and see for yourself.' The soldier answered, 'I believe you,' and passed on. In another case, the Germans entered a house where the Belgians were, and passed the night in the room just underneath them! A jeweller's shop was broken into, and the property destroyed or stolen; and in a private dwelling, the lady of the house, finding herself alone with four officers—her husband having been taken as hostage—she took to flight, on which the Germans went all through the place, doing considerable damage. In other cases, they behaved pretty civilly. Our washerwoman had thirty to breakfast, of whom several had slept in her establishment, leading their horses into her drawing-room! On seeing her little boys, they had exclaimed, 'Here are some brave little soldiers for us, later on!' And, on the mother venturing a mild expostulation, they added, 'Yes, you are all Germans now—Belgo-Germans'; while, before leaving, they wrote on her board—'We are Germans; we fear no one; we fear only God and our Emperor!' What troubled her the most was that her unwelcome guests had laid hold of her clean washing, taking all that they wanted;

amongst other things, our towels had disappeared. We were, as may well be imagined, but too pleased to be rid of the dread Germans at so little cost.

It appears that while the German army was still in Ypres, some 12,000 British soldiers, having followed on its track, stopped at a little distance from the town, sending word to the burgomaster that, if he wished, they were ready to attack the enemy. M. Colaert, however, not desiring to see the town given up to pillage and destruction, was opposed to a British advance.

By this time the whole town was on the *qui vive*, and no one thought of anything else but how best to secure any valuables that they had; for the stories of what had happened in other parts of Belgium were not at all reassuring. Several tried to leave the town; but the few trains that were running were kept exclusively for the troops, while the Germans sent back all those who left on foot. To increase the panic, no less than five aeroplanes passed during the day; and the knowledge that the enemy had left soldiers with two mitrailleuses at the Porte de Lille, to guard the town, completed the feeling of insecurity. Moreover — as the soldiers had literally emptied the town of all the eatables they could lay their hands on—sinister rumours of famine were soon spread abroad. Reverend Mother Prioress sent out immediately for some sacks of flour, but none was to be got; and we were obliged to content ourselves with wheatmeal instead. Rice, coffee, and butter we had, together with some tins of fish. The potatoes were to come that very day, and great was our anxiety lest the cart would be met by the Germans and the contents seized. However, the farmer put off coming for some days, and at length arrived safely with the load, a boy going in front to see that no soldiers were about. The milk-woman, whose farm was a little way outside the town, was unable to come in, and no meat could be got for love or money; so we were obliged to make the best of what we had, and each day Mother Prioress went to the kitchen herself to see if she could not possibly make a new dish from the never varying meal—rice, Quaker oats, and maizena.

Ultimately the Allies came to our help,

and a motor-car, armed with a mitrailleuse, flew through the streets and opened fire on the Germans. Taken by surprise, the latter ran to their guns; but, through some mishap, the naphtha took fire in one of them, whereupon the Germans retreated. Three of their men were wounded, and one civilian killed. On the Friday, we began to breathe freely again, when suddenly news came, even to the Abbey, that one hundred Germans were parading round the town. On Sunday, the Allies came once more to chase them; but, for the moment, the Germans had disappeared. Things continued thus for some days, until, to the delight of the inhabitants, the British took entire possession of the town, promising that the Germans would never enter it again. Just one week after the coming of the Germans, the troops of the Allies poured in, until, amid the enthusiastic cheers of the people, 21,000 soldiers filled the streets. Those who came by the monastery passed down the Rue St. Jacques singing lustily:

> ‘Here we are, here we are, here we are again:
> Here we are, here we are, here we are again!’

Then alternately each side repeated: ‘Hallo!

Hallo ! Hallo ! Hallo ! ' The crowd, whose knowledge of the English language did not extend far enough to enable them to grasp the meaning of ' Here we are again ' soon, however, caught up the chorus of ' Hallo ! Hallo ! ' and quickly the street resounded with cries, which were certainly discordant, but which, nevertheless, expressed the enthusiastic joy of the people.

CHAPTER II

THE ALLIES IN YPRES

THE contrast between the reception of the two armies was striking. On the arrival of the Germans, people kept in their houses, or looked at the foe with frightened curiosity; now, everyone lined the streets, eager for a glimpse of the brave soldiers who had come to defend Ypres. A week before, the citizens had furnished food to the enemy, because they dared not refuse it—and only then what they were obliged to give. Now, each one vied with the other in giving. Bread, butter, milk, chocolate—everything they had—went to the soldiers, and sounds of rejoicing came from all sides. Perhaps, the most pleased of all were the poor wounded Belgians, who had been so tried the preceding week. All those who were able to drag themselves along crowded to the windows and doors, to welcome their new comrades; and the latter, unable to make themselves understood by words, made vigorous signs that they were about to chop off the Germans' heads. What excited the most curiosity were the 'petticoats,' as they were styled, of the Highlanders, and everyone gave their opinion on this truly extraordinary uniform, which had not been previously seen in these parts. The soldiers were quartered in the different houses and establishments of the town. Once more the Abbey was left unmolested, though once again also the want of bread was felt—not, that it had been this time stolen, but that, in spite of all their efforts, the bakers could not supply the gigantic demand for bread necessary to feed our newly arrived friends. Seeing that we were likely to be forgotten in the general excitement, Edmund was sent out to see what he could find. After many vain efforts, he at last succeeded in getting three very small-sized loaves, with which he returned in triumph. Scarcely had he got inside the parlour, when there came a vigorous tug at the bell. The new-comer proved to be a man who, having caught sight of the bread, came to beg some for 'his soldiers.' Edmund was highly indignant, and loudly expostulated; but the poor man, with tears in his eyes, turned to Mother Prioress (who had just entered), and offered to pay for the bread, if only she would give him a little. 'I have my own son at the front,' he exclaimed, 'and I should be so grateful to anyone that I knew had shown kindness to him; and now I have been all over the town to get bread for my soldiers, and there is none to be had!' Mother Prioress' kind heart was touched, and telling the good man to keep his money, she gave him the loaves as well, with which he soon vanished out of the door, Edmund grumbling all the time because the nuns (and himself) had been deprived of their supper. Mother Prioress, laughing, told him the soldiers needed it more than we. She turned away, thinking over what she could possibly give the community for supper. She went—almost mechanically—to the bread-bin, where, lifting up the lid, she felt round in the dark. What was her delight to find two loaves which still remained, and which had to suffice for supper—as well as breakfast next morning.

We retired to rest, feeling we were, at any rate, well guarded; and the firm tread of the sentries, as they passed under our windows at regular intervals, inspired us with very different feelings from those we had experienced the week before, on hearing the heavy footsteps of the German watch.

The officials of the British Headquarters entered the town with the army, and for several weeks Ypres was their chief station, from which issued all the commands for the troops in the surrounding districts. We were not long, however, in knowing the consequences of such an honour. The next day, at about 10.30 A.M., the whirr of an aeroplane was heard. We were becoming accustomed to such novelties, and so did not pay too much attention, till, to our horror, we heard a volley of shots from the Grand' Place saluting the new-comer. We knew from this what nationality the visitor was. The firing continued for some time, and then ceased. What had happened? Our enclosure prevented us from following the exciting events of those troubled times, but friends usually kept us supplied with the most important news. It was thus that, soon afterwards, we heard the fate of the air monster which had tried to spy into what was happening within our walls. The first shots had been unsuccessful; but at last two struck the machine, which began rapidly to descend. The inmates, unhurt, flew for their lives as soon as they touched ground; but, seizing the first motor-car to hand, the soldiers chased them, and at last took them prisoners. What was their horror to find in the aeroplane a plan of the town of Ypres, with places marked, on which to throw the three bombs, one of these places being the Grand' Place, then occupied by thousands of British soldiers.

Endless were the thanksgivings which mounted up to heaven for such a preservation, and prayers and supplications for Divine protection were redoubled. Since the beginning of the War, everyone, even the most indifferent, had turned to God, from Whom alone they felt that succour could come; and those who before never put their foot in church were now amongst the most fervent. Pilgrimages and processions were organised to turn aside the impending calamity; and, heedless of human respect, rich and poor, the fervent and the indifferent, raised their voices to the Mother of God, who has never yet been called upon in vain. Even the procession of Our Lady of Thuyn—so well known to all those who yearly flock to Ypres for the first Sunday in August—with its groups, its decorations, its music, had been turned into a penitential procession; and the 'Kermess' and other festivities, which took place during the following eight days, were prohibited. Needless to say, the Monastery was not behindhand. Every day the community assembled together at 1 o'clock for the recitation of the rosary, and, when possible, prayed aloud during the different employments of the day. Numberless were the aspirations to the Sacred Heart, Our Lady of Angels, Our Holy Father St. Benedict, each one's favourite patron, the Holy Angels, or the Souls in Purgatory. Each suggested what they thought the most likely to inspire devotion. Perhaps the best of all was that which Dame Josephine—*Requiescat in Pace*—announced to us one day at recreation. It ran as follows: 'Dear St. Patrick, as you once chased the serpents and venomous reptiles out of Ireland, please now chase the Germans out of Belgium!' The Office of the Dead was not forgotten for those who had fallen on the battle-field, and we offered all our privations and sacrifices for the good success of the Allies, or the repose of the souls of the poor soldiers already killed. We also undertook to make badges of the Sacred Heart for the soldiers, though at the moment we saw no possible means of distributing them. At length, to our great joy, the arrival of the British troops, among whom were many Irish Catholics, opened an apostolate for us, which went on ever increasing. The idea had first come to us when, weeks before, a number of Belgian soldiers were announced, of whom 250 were to have been quartered at the college. Reverend Mother Prioress had then suggested that we should make badges, so as at least to help in some little way, when everyone else seemed to be doing so much. We set to work with good will—some cutting the flannel—others embroidering—others writing—till at last we had finished. What was our disappointment to hear that not a single soldier had come to the college. We then tried, in every way possible, to find a means of distributing our handiwork; but all in vain, till one day, a poor girl, called Hélène, who washed the steps and outer porch leading to the principal entrance of the convent, came to beg prayers for her brother who was at the front. Mother Prioress promised her we should all pray for her brother, at the same time giving her a badge of the Sacred Heart for him, together with a dozen others for anyone else she might know to be in the same position. Hélène soon returned for more, and the devotion spreading through the town, everyone came flocking to the parlour to get badges for a father, a brother, a cousin, a nephew at the front, many even also asking them for themselves, so that they might be preserved from all danger. Even the little children in the streets came, to ask for 'a little heart!' until the poor Sister at the door was unable to get through her other work, owing to the constant ringing of the bell. In despair, she laid her complaints before her Superior, saying that a troop of children were there again, of whom one had come the first thing in the morning for a badge. On receiving it she had gone outside, where, changing hats with another child, she promptly returned, pretending to be some one else. The Sister, who had seen the whole performance through the *guichet*, had smiled at her innocent trick, and given her another. But now here she was again, this time with some one else's apron on, and bringing half a dozen other children with her. Mother Prioress then saw the little girl herself, who, nothing abashed, put out her hand saying, ‘ Des petits cœurs, s'il vous plaît, ma Sœur ! ’ This was too much for Mother Prioress' tender heart, and, instead of scolding, she told them there was nothing ready then; but for the future, if they came back on Mondays, they might have as many ‘ petits cœurs ’ as they wished. The little troop marched quite contentedly out of the door, headed by the girl—who could not have been more than seven years old—and diminishing in size and age down to a little mite of two, who toddled out, hanging on to his brother's coat. The devout procession was brought up by a tiny black dog, which seemed highly delighted with the whole proceeding. This little digression has brought us away from our subject, but was perhaps necessary to show how we were able to send badges to the soldiers, by means of this somewhat strange manner of apostolate; for a young girl, hearing of the devotion, brought them by dozens to St. Peter's parish (where an Irish regiment was stationed), impressing on each man, as she pinned the badge to his uniform, that it was made by 'the Irish Dames!'

CHAPTER III

INCIDENTS OF THE STRUGGLE

MEANWHILE, in the distance, we could hear the sound of cannonading, which told us of the approach of the enemy; and when we met at recreation, the one and only topic of conversation was the War. Each day brought its item of news—such or such a town had fallen, another was being bombarded, a village had been razed to the ground, another was burning, so many prisoners had been taken, such a number wounded, many alas! killed. As often as not, what we heard one day was contradicted the next, and what was confirmed in the morning as a fact, was flatly denied in the afternoon; so that one really did not know what to believe. We could at least believe our own ears, and those told us, by the ever-approaching sound of firing, that the danger was steadily increasing for the brave little town of Ypres. It was therefore decided that, in case of emergency, each nun should prepare a parcel of what was most necessary, lest the worst should come, and we should be obliged to fly.

Soon, crowds of refugees, from the towns and villages in the firing line, thronged the streets. The city was already crowded with soldiers. Where, then, could the refugees find lodging and nourishment ? How were they to be assisted ? All helped as far as they were able, and dinner and supper were daily distributed to some thirty or forty at the Abbey doors. This meant an increase of work, which already weighed heavily enough on our reduced numbers; for we had, since September 8, lost four subjects—one choir dame and three lay-sisters—owing to the law then issued, commanding the expulsion of all Germans resident in Belgium. This had been the first shock. Nothing as yet foretold the future, nor gave us the least subject for serious alarm, when, on the afternoon of September 7, an official came to the parlour to acquaint us with the newly published law, and to say that our four German nuns would have to leave within thirty-six hours. We were literally stunned.

Benedictines! Enclosed nuns! All over twenty-five years in the convent! What harm could they do? Surely no one could suspect them of being spies. Telegrams flew to Bruges, even to Antwerp, to obtain grace—all was useless, and at 3.30 P.M., September 8, we assisted at the first departure from the Abbey, which we innocently thought would be at the worst for about three weeks, little dreaming what we should still live to see. These first poor victims were conducted by our chaplain to his lordship the Bishop of Bruges, who placed them in a convent just over the frontier in Holland, where we continued corresponding with them, until all communication was cut off by the arrival of the Germans, as has already been stated. In the result, we found our labours increased by the loss of our three lay-sisters; but we divided the work between us, and even rather enjoyed the novelty. Poor old Sister Magdalen (our oldest lay-sister), however, failed to see any joke in the business; and when she found herself once again cook, as she had been when she was young and active, her lamentations were unceasing. We tried to assist her, but she found us more in the way than anything else. She discovered at last a consoler in the person of Edmund, who offered to peel apples, pears, and potatoes; and when the two could get together, Sister Magdalen poured forth the tale of her endless woes into Edmund's sympathetic ear, whilst he in return gave her the 'latest news'; and it was a curious spectacle to see the two together in the little court anxiously examining a passing aeroplane, to know of what nationality it was, though which of the pair was to decide the matter was rather questionable, Edmund being exceedingly short-sighted, and Sister Magdalen not too well versed in such learned matters. To return to the refugees: Mother Prioress took some of us to help her in the children's refectory, and with her own hands prepared the food for them. For dinner they had a good soup, with plenty of boiled potatoes, bread, and beer: for supper, a plateful of porridge in which we mixed thin slices of apple, which made a delicious dish, and then potatoes in their jackets, bread, and beer. We had to work hard, for it was no small task to get such a meal ready for about forty starving persons. We left Sister

Magdalen to grumble alone in the kitchen over the mysterious disappearance of her best pots and pans ; especially one evening, when, forgetting to turn the appetising mixture which was preparing for supper, we not only spoilt the porridge, but burnt a hole in a beautiful copper saucepan.

The sound of hostilities came ever nearer and nearer. Dreadful rumours were current of an important battle about to be fought in the proximity of Ypres. What made things worse was the great number of spies that infested the neighbourhood. Daily they were arrested, but yet others managed to replace them. Four soldiers and one civilian kept a vigilant watch on the town, examining every one who seemed the least suspicious, as much as the prisoners themselves.

Roulers, Warneton, Dixmude, and countless other towns and villages had succumbed ; and at last, to our great grief, news reached us that the Germans were in Bruges, and had taken possession of the episcopal palace—and our much-loved Bishop, where was he ? Alas ! we were doomed not to hear, for all communication was cut off, and for the future we only knew what was happening in and around Ypres. And was it not enough ? The windows already shook with the heavy firing. The roar of the guns in the distance scarcely stopped a moment. From the garret windows, we could already see the smoke of the battle on the horizon ; and to think that, at every moment, hundreds of souls were appearing before the judgment-seat of God ! Were they prepared ? Terrifying problem !

As everywhere else, the German numbers far exceeded those of the Allies. It consequently came to pass that the latter were forced to retreat. It was thus that on Wednesday, October 21, we received the alarming news that the town would probably be bombarded in the evening. We had already prepared our parcels in case we should be obliged to fly and now we were advised to live in our cellars, which were pronounced quite safe against any danger of shells or bombs. But our dear Lady Abbess, how should we get her down to the cellar, when it was only with great difficulty that she could move from one room to another ? If we were suddenly forced to leave, what then would she do ?

We could only leave the matter in God's hands. We carried down a carpet, bed, armchair, and other things, to try to make matters as comfortable as possible for her—then our own bedding and provisions. The precious treasures and antiquities had already been placed in security, and we now hastened to collect the remaining books and statues, which we hoped to save from the invaders. We had also been advised to pile up sand and earth against the cellar windows to deaden the force of the shells should they come in our direction. But if this were the case, they would first encounter the provision of pétrole in the garden—and then we should all be burnt alive. To prepare for this alarming contingency, Dame Teresa and Dame Bernard, armed with spades, proceeded to the far end of the garden, where they dug an immense hole, at the same time carrying the earth to block the entrances to the different cellars. After a whole day's hard labour, they succeeded in finishing their excavation and in tilting the huge barrel, which they could neither roll nor drag—it being both too full and too heavy—to the place prepared. Their labour, however, proved all in vain ; for Edmund, displeased at the barrel's disappearance, then highly amused at the brilliant enterprise, declared he could not draw the pétrole unless put back in its old position.

The reported fortunate arrival of a large number of Indian troops (they said 400,000, though 40,000 would be nearer the mark) had a reassuring effect : but we still remained in suspense, for if the Allies came by thousands, the Germans had a million men in the neighbourhood. The Allies and Germans also sustained frightful losses. The ambulance cars continually brought in the unfortunate victims from the battlefield, till at last the town was full to overflowing. One Sunday morning, a French officer and military doctor came to visit the convent to see if it would not be possible to place their wounded with us. We willingly offered our services, and Mother Prioress showing them the class-rooms, it was decided that the whole wing facing the ramparts, including the class-rooms, children's dormitory and refectory, the library, noviceship and work-room, should be emptied and placed at their disposal. The great drawback was the lack of bedding; for already, before the arrival of the Germans in the town, we had given all we could possibly spare for the Belgian wounded, who had at that time been transported to Ypres. The two gentlemen took their leave, very pleased with their visit, the officer—who seemed to all appearances a fervent Catholic—promising to send round word in the afternoon, when all should be decided. Despite the fact that it was Sunday, we listened (after having obtained permission) to the proverb, 'Many hands make light work,' and soon the rooms in question were emptied of all that would not serve for the soldiers, and were ready for their use. What was our disappointment, in the afternoon, to hear that the French officer, thanking us profusely for our offer, had found another place, which was more suitable, as being nearer the site of the engagement. We had always shown our goodwill, and were only too pleased to help in any little way the brave soldiers, who daily, nay hourly, watered with their blood Belgium's unfortunate soil. This was not the last we heard of the officer; for we soon had a visit from a French deacon, who was serving as infirmarian at the ambulance, begging for bandages for the wounded soldiers. All our recreations and free moments were spent in 'rolling' bandages, for which were sacrificed sheets and veils, and in fact anything that could serve for the purpose—to all of which we of course added dozens of badges of the Sacred Heart. The deacon was overjoyed and returned several times 'to beg,' giving us news of the fighting. One day he brought a little souvenir, by way of thanks for our help. It consisted of a prayer-book found on a German wounded prisoner, who had died. The prayers were really beautiful, being taken mostly from passages of the Psalms, adapted for the time of war; while the soiled leaves showed that the book had been well read.

One afternoon, about this time, the Sister who acted as portress announced the visit of an 'English Catholic priest,' serving as army chaplain. Mother Prioress went immediately round to the parlour to receive the reverend visitor, who stated that he had been charged by a well-known English lord, should he ever pass by Ypres, to come to our convent, to see the 'English flag' which one of his ancestors had sent to the Abbey. Mother Prioress assured him that the only flag in the convent was the famous one captured by the Irish Brigade in the service of France at the battle of Ramillies.[1] She added that she would be happy to give him a photograph of the flag. He said he would be enchanted, promising to call the next day to fetch it. Accordingly, the following day he returned, accompanied by two officers. Dame Josephine, together with Dame Teresa and Dame Patrick, were sent to entertain them. On entering the parlour, Dame Josephine immediately knelt to receive the 'priest's' blessing, who looked rather put out at this unwonted respect. After an interesting conversation on various topics, she asked how long he had been attached to the army. He said he had volunteered as chaplain, being in reality a monk, having also charge of a community of nuns. More and more interested at not only finding a 'priest' but a 'monk,' Dame Josephine expressed her admiration of the sacrifice he must have made in thus leaving his monastery, and asked to what Order he belonged. The reverend gentleman said that he was of the Order of St. John the Evangelist, and that he was indeed longing to be able to put on once more his holy habit. Then, making a sign to the officers, he abruptly finished the conversation, stating that he had an appointment, which he could by no means miss, and quickly vanished out of the parlour. Dame Teresa and Dame Patrick, who had hardly been able to keep in their laughter, now told Dame Josephine of her mistake; for they had truthfully divined that the supposed 'priest' was a Protestant clergyman. In fact he had stated on his introduction that he was 'a priest of the Church of England,' from which Dame Josephine had inferred that he was an 'English Catholic priest'; and so her special attention to him. Dame Teresa and Dame Patrick had rightly interpreted the visitor's description of himself as a Protestant clergyman, and enjoyed Dame Josephine's mistake.

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[1] See Note at end of Chapter.

Outside, the noise grew ever louder.

The roar of the cannon, the rolling of the carriages, Paris omnibuses, provision and ambulance cars, the continual passage of cavalry and foot soldiers, and the motor-cars passing with lightning-like speed, made the quiet, sleepy little town of Ypres as animated as London's busiest streets. At night even the Allied regiments poured in, profiting by the obscurity to hide their movements from the Germans; while, contrasting with the darkness, the fire from the battle-field showed up clearly against the midnight sky. One evening, as we made our usual silent visit to the garrets before going to bed, a signal of alarm announced that something more than ordinary had occurred. In the distance thick clouds of smoke rose higher and higher, which, from time to time rolling back their dense masses, showed sheets of fire and flame. Were the Germans trying to set fire to the town? No one was near to enlighten us; so, anxious and uneasy, we retired to our cells, begging earnest help from Heaven. Since the first warning of bombardment one or other of us stopped up at night, being relieved after some hours, in case anything should happen while the community took their rest.

The most alarming news continued to pour in. The soldiers, by means of their telescopes, had descried two German aeroplanes throwing down pétrole to set the country and villages on fire. Were we to expect the same fate? Stories of German atrocities reached us from all quarters; but what moved us most was the account of the outrageous barbarities used upon women, even upon nuns.

We were far from an end of our troubles. Despite the danger and anxiety, we strove to keep up religious life, and the regular observances went on at the usual hours. Instead of distracting us, the roar of the battle only made us lift up our hearts with more fervour to God; and it was with all the ardour of our souls that we repeated, at each succeeding hour of the Divine Office: 'Deus, in adjutorium meum intende! Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina!' The liturgy of Holy Mass, also—one would have said it had been composed especially for the moment.

On Wednesday, October 28, between 1.30 and 2 P.M.—the hour for our pious meditation—we were suddenly interrupted by a noise to which we were not as yet accustomed. It seemed at first to be only a cannon-ball, flying off on its deadly errand; but instead of growing feebler, as the shell sped away towards the German ranks, the sound and whirr of this new messenger of death grew ever louder and more rapid, till it seemed, in its frightful rush, to be coming straight on our doomed heads! Instinctively some flew to the little chapel of Our Blessed Lady at one end of the garden; others remained still where they were, not daring to move, till after a few seconds, which seemed interminable, a deafening explosion told us that something dreadful (alas! we knew not what) must have occurred. We learned, afterwards, that it was the first of the bombs with which the enemy, infuriated at the resistance of what they disdainfully styled 'a handful of British soldiers,' determined to destroy the town which they already feared they would never retake. The first bombs, however, did no damage—the one which had so frightened us falling into the moat which surrounds Ypres, behind the Church of St. James, and two others just outside the town. At about

9.30 P.M., when we were retiring to our cells after matins, another sound, far from musical, fell on our ears. As usual, some sped silently to the garrets, where, though hearing strange noises, they could see nothing; so everyone went to rest, concluding it was the sound of bombs again. In fact the Germans were bombarding the town. We heard, the next day, that several houses in the Rue Notre-Dame had been struck, and all the windows in the street broken. The owners innocently sent for the glazier to have the panes of glass repaired, little thinking that, in a few weeks, scarce one window would remain in the whole of Ypres.

Not content with fighting on the ground, it seemed as though the sky also would soon form a second battle-field. Aeroplanes passed at regular hours from the town to the place of encounter, to bring back news to the Headquarters how the battle was waging. Besides this, German Taubes made their appearance, waiting to seize their opportunity to renew, with more success than their first attempt, the disastrous ruin caused by the bombs. It was high time to think of our dear Abbess' safety. It was therefore decided that she should take refuge at Poperinghe, and Mother Prioress sent out for a carriage to convey her there; but in the general panic which reigned, every possible means of conveyance had been seized. After several enquiries, a cab was at last secured, and soon drove up to the convent. Our dear Lady was so moved, when the news was broken to her, that four of us were obliged to carry her downstairs. After a little rest, we helped her to the carriage, which had driven round into the garden, to avoid the inconveniences which would necessarily have arisen had the departure taken place in the street. It proved almost impossible to get her into the carriage, owing to her inability to help herself. At length, thanks to the assistance of one of the Sisters of Providence, who had been more than devoted to her ever since her stroke, we succeeded; and accompanied by Dame Josephine, a Jubilarian, Dame Placid, and Sister Magdalen, our beloved Abbess drove out of the enclosure,[1] the great door soon hiding her from our sight. Sad, troubled, and anxious, we turned back, wondering what would become of our dear absent ones. Would they arrive safely at their destination? Would they find kind faces and warm hearts to welcome them? Only the boom of the guns mockingly answered our silent enquiries.

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[1] By the Constitution of the Order, the enclosure may be broken in times of war, and in other cases provided for.

NOTE TO CHAPTER III

THE 'FLAG' AT YPRES

BY R. BARRY O'BRIEN

There is a 'legend' of a 'blue flag' said to have been carried or captured by the Irish Brigade at the battle of Ramillies, and which was subsequently deposited in the Irish convent at Ypres. This is a sceptical age. People do not believe unless they see; and I wished to submit this 'blue flag' to the test of ocular demonstration. Accordingly, in the autumn of 1907, I paid a visit to the old Flemish town, now so familiar to us all in its misfortunes. I was hospitably received by the kind and cheerful nuns who answered all my questions about the flag and the convent with alacrity. 'Can I see the flag?'—

'Certainly.' And the 'flag' was sent for. It turned out not to be a blue flag at all. Blue was only part of a flag which, it would seem, had been originally blue, red, and yellow. An aged Irish nun described the flag as she had first seen it.

'It was attached to a stick, and I remember reading on a slip of paper which was on the flag "Remerciements Refuged at Ypres, 170.." The flag consisted of three parts—blue with a harp, red with three lions, and yellow. The red and yellow parts were accidentally destroyed, and all that remains is the blue, as you see it, with a harp; and we have also preserved one of the lions. The story that has come down to us is that it was left here after the battle of Ramillies I think, but whether it was the flag of the Irish Brigade, or an English flag captured by them at the battle, I do not know.'

The flag, of course—blue with a harp, red with three lions, and yellow—suggests the royal standard of England, with a difference. At the time of the battle of Ramillies, the royal standard, or 'King's Colour,' consisted of four quarterings: the first and fourth quarters were subdivided, the three lions of England being in one half, the lion of Scotland in the other. The *fleurs-de-lis* were in the second quarter; the Irish harp was in the third.[1] But this (the Ypres) flag had, when the nun saw it, only apparently the first and third quarters—blue with harp, red with three lions, and yellow; the rest had then been apparently destroyed.

At the famous battle of 1706, the Irish Brigade was posted in the village of Ramillies. They fought with characteristic valour, giving way only when the French were beaten in another part of the field. The Brigade was commanded by Lord Clare, who was mortally wounded in the fight. Charles Forman writes, in a letter published in 1735:—

'At Ramillies we see Clare's regiment shining with trophies and covered with laurels even in the midst of a discomfited routed army. They had to do with a regiment which, I assure you, was neither Dutch nor German, and their courage precipitated them so far in pursuit of their enemy that they found themselves engaged at last in the throng of our army, where they braved their fate with incredible resolution. If you are desirous to know what regiment it was they engaged that day, the colours in the cloister of the Irish nuns at Ypres, which I thought had been taken by another Irish regiment, will satisfy your curiosity.'[1]

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[1] *Enc. Brit.* 11th ed.

Mr. Matthew O'Conor, in his 'Military Memoirs of the Irish Nation,' says :—

'Lord Clare . . . cut his way through the enemy's battalions, bearing down their infantry with matchless intrepidity. In the heroic effort to save his corps he was mortally wounded, and many of his best officers were killed. His Lieutenant, Colonel Murrough O'Brien, on this occasion evinced heroism worthy of the name of O'Brien. Assuming the command, and leading on his men with fixed bayonets, he bore down and broke through the enemy's ranks, took two pair of colours from the enemy, and joined the rere of the French retreat on the heights of St. Andre.'

Forman does not state to what regiment the colours belonged. O'Callaghan, in his 'History of the Irish Brigade,' quotes him as saying: 'I could be much more particular in relating this action, but some reasons oblige me, in prudence, to say no more of it.'

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[1] Forman: *Courage of the Irish Nation.*

O'Conor says that the colours belonged to a celebrated English regiment. O'Callaghan is more precise. He says:—

'According to Captain Peter Drake, of Drakerath, County of Meath (who was at the battle with Villeroy's army, in De Couriere's regiment), Lord Clare engaged with a Scotch regiment in the Dutch service, between whom there was a great slaughter; that nobleman having lost 289 private centinels, 22 commissioned officers, and 14 sergeants; yet they not only saved their colours, but gained a pair from the enemy. This Scotch regiment in the Dutch service was, by my French account, "almost entirely destroyed"; and, by the same account, Clare's engaged with equal honour the "English Regiment of Churchill," or that of the Duke of Marlborough's brother, Lieutenant-General Charles Churchill, and then commanded by its Colonel's son, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Churchill. This fine corps, at present the 3rd Regiment of Foot, or the Buffs, signalized itself very much in the action with another, or Lord Mordaunt's, "by driving three French regiments into a morass, where most of them were either destroyed or taken prisoners." But the "Régiment Anglois de Churchill," according to the French narrative, fared very differently in encountering the Regiment of Clare, by which its colours were captured, as well as those of the "Régiment Hollandois," or "Scotch regiment in the Dutch service."'

The question may, or may not, be problematical, but it seems to me that what I saw in the convent at Ypres was a remnant of one of the flags captured, according to the authorities I have quoted, by the Irish Brigade at the battle of Ramillies; and that flag was, apparently, the 'King's Colour' which reproduces the royal standard.

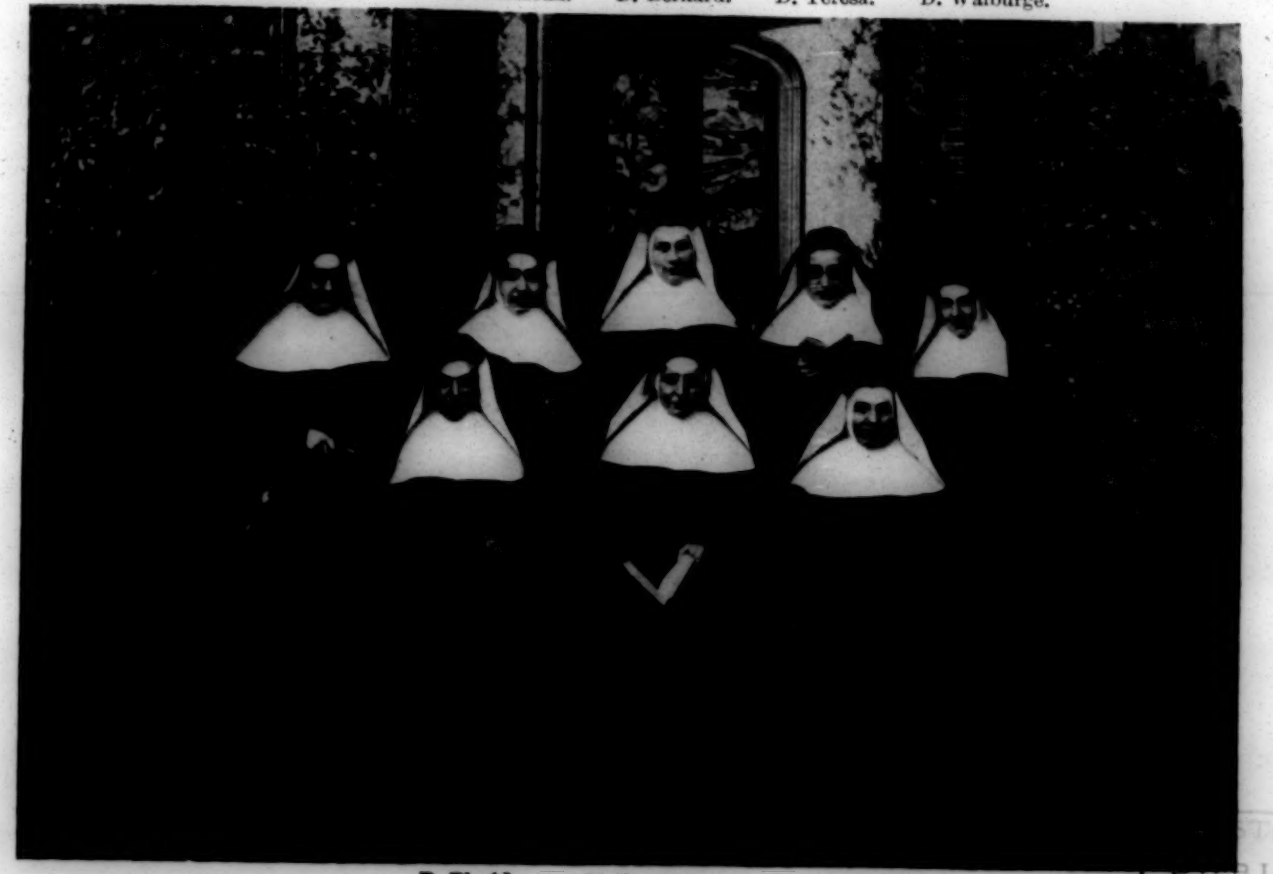
CHAPTER IV

IN THE CELLARS

We were soon recalled from our reflections; for Mother Prioress, emerging from the parlour, announced to us that we were to have visitors that night. Two priests and five ladies had begged to be allowed to come to sleep in our cellars, as news had been brought that the Germans might penetrate into the town that very evening. One could not refuse at such a moment, though the idea was a novel one—enclosed nuns taking in strangers for the night. But in the face of such imminent peril, and in a case of life or death, there was no room for hesitation. So to work we set, preparing one cellar for the priests, and another for the ladies. In the midst of dragging down carpets, arm-chairs mattresses, the news soon spread that there was word from Poperinghe. We all crowded round Mother

Prioress in the cellar, where, by the light of a little lamp, she endeavoured in vain to decipher a letter which Dame Placid had hurriedly scribbled in pencil, before the driver left to return to Ypres. The picture was worth painting! Potatoes on one side, mattresses and bolsters on the other—a carpet half unrolled—each of us trying to peep over the other's shoulder, and to come as near as possible to catch every word. But alas! these latter were few in number and not reassuring. 'We can only get one room for Lady Abbess. . . . Everywhere full up. . . . We are standing shivering in the rain. . . . Please send ——' Then followed a list of things which were wanting. Poor Lady Abbess! Poor Dame Josephine! What was to be done? Mother Prioress consoled us by telling us she would send the carriage back the first thing next morning to see how everyone was, and to take all that was required. We then finished off our work as quickly as possible, and retired to our own cellar to say compline and matins; for it was already 10 o'clock. After this we lay down on our 'straw-sacks'—no one undressed. Even our 'refugees' had brought

D. Patrick. D. Columban. D. Bernard. D. Teresa. D. Walburge.



D. Placid. Mother Prioress. D. Aloysius.

The Irish Dames of Ypres.

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their packages with them, in case we should have to fly during the night. Contrary to all expectations, everything remained quiet—even the guns seemed to sleep. Was it a good or evil omen? Time would show.

At 5 o'clock next morning the alarm-clock aroused the community, instead of the well-known sound of the bell. There was no need, either, of the accustomed 'Domine, labia mea aperies' at each cell door. At 5.30, we repaired to the choir as usual for meditation, and at 6 recited lauds — prime and tierce. At 7, the conventual Mass began; when, as though they had heard the long-silent bell, the guns growled out, like some caged lion, angry at being disturbed from its night's rest. The signal given, the battle waged fiercer than before, and the rattling windows, together with the noise resounding through the church and choir, told that the silence of the night had been the result of some tactics of the Germans, who had repulsed the Allies. Day of desolation, greater than we had before experienced! Not because the enemy was nearer, not because we were in more danger, but because, at the end of Holy Mass, we found ourselves deprived of what, up till then, had been our sole consolation in our anguish and woe. The sacred species had been consumed—the tabernacle was empty. The sanctuary lamp was extinguished. The fear of desecration had prompted this measure of prudence, and henceforth our daily Communion would be the only source of consolation, from which we should have to derive the courage and strength we so much needed.

The Germans nearer meant greater danger; so, with still more ardour, we set to work, especially as we were now still more reduced in numbers. The question suddenly arose, 'Who was to prepare the dinner?' Our cook, as has already been said, had been one of the three German Sisters who had left us on September 8; subsequently, Sister Magdalen had replaced her, and she, too, now was gone. After mature deliberation, Dame Columban was named to fulfil that important function. But another puzzle presented itself—What were we to eat? For weeks, no one had seen an egg! Now, no milk could be got.

Fish was out of the question—there was no one left to fish. To complete the misery, no bread arrived, for our baker had left the town. Nothing remained but to make some small loaves of meal, and whatever else we could manage—with potatoes, oatmeal, rice, and butter (of which the supply was still ample), adding apples and pears in abundance. Edmund was sent out to see if he could find anything in the town. He returned with four packets of Quaker oats, saying that that was all he could find, but that we could still have a hundred salted herrings if we wished to send for them.

We had just begun the cooking, when the tinkling of the little bell called everyone together, only to hear that a German Taube was sailing just over the Abbey; so we were all ordered down to the cellars, but before we reached them there was crack! crack! bang! bang! and the rifle-shots flew up, from the street outside the convent, to salute the unwelcome visitor. But to no purpose, and soon the sinister whistling whirr of a descending projectile grated on our ears, while, with a loud crash, the bomb fell on some unfortunate building. We had at first been rather amused at this strange descent to our modern catacombs; but we soon changed our mirth to prayer, and aspiration followed aspiration, till the ceasing of the firing told us that the enemy was gone. We then emerged from the darkness, for we had hidden in the excavation under the steps leading up to the entrance of the Monastery, as the surest place of refuge, there being no windows. This was repeated five or six times a day; so we brought some work to the cellars to occupy us. The firing having begun next morning before breakfast was well finished, one sister arrived down with tea and bread and butter. Later on, while we were preparing some biscuits, the firing started again; so we brought down the mixing-bowl, ingredients and all. We continued our work and prayers and paid no more attention to the bombs or the rifle-shots.

Our dear Lady Abbess was not forgotten. The next day Mother Prioress sent for the carriage, while we all breathed a fervent 'Deo gratias' that our aged Abbess was out of danger; for what would she have done in the midst of all the bombs? Owing to the panic, which was now at its height, all the inhabitants who were able were leaving the town, abandoning their houses, property—all, all—anxious only to save their lives. There was no means of finding a carriage.

Our life, by this time, had become still more like that of the Christians of the first era of the Church, our cellars taking the place of the catacombs, to which they bore some resemblance. We recited the Divine Office in the provision cellar under the kitchen, which we had first intended for Lady Abbess. A crucifix and statue of Our Lady replaced the altar. On the left were huge wooden cases filled with potatoes, and one small one of turnips—on the right, a cistern of water, with a big block for cutting meat (we had carefully hidden the hatchet, in case the Germans, seeing the two together, should be inspired to chop off our heads). Behind us, other cases were filled with boxes and sundry things, whilst on top of them were the bread-bins. We were, however, too much taken up with the danger we were in to be distracted by our surroundings. We realised then, to the full, the weakness of man's feeble efforts, and how true it is that God alone is able to protect those who put their trust in Him. The cellar adjoining, leading up to the kitchen, was designed for the refectory. In it were the butter-tubs, the big meat-safe, the now empty jars for the milk. A long narrow table was placed down the centre, with our serviettes, knives, spoons, and forks ; while everyone tried to take as little space as possible, so as to leave room for her neighbour. The procession to dinner and supper was rather longer than usual, leading from the ante-choir through the kitchen, scullery, down the cellar stairs, and it was no light work carrying down all the 'portions,' continually running up and down the steps, with the evident danger of arriving at the bottom quicker than one wanted to, sending plates and dishes in advance.

Time was passing away, we now had to strip the altar—to put away the throne and tabernacle. Some one suggested placing the tabernacle in the ground, using a very large iron boiler to keep out the damp, and thus prevent it from being spoilt. This plan, however, did not succeed, as will be seen. Dame Teresa and Dame Bernard flew off to enlarge the pit they had already begun, watching all the time for any Taube which might by chance drop a bomb on their heads, and, indeed, more than once, they were obliged to take refuge in the Abbey. Strange to say, these things took place on Sunday, the Feast of All Saints. It was rather hard work for a holiday of obligation, but we obtained the necessary authorisation. Towards evening the hole was finished and the boiler placed in readiness. But how lift the throne, which took four men to carry as far as the inner sacristy ? First we thought of getting some workmen, but were any still in the town ? No, we must do it ourselves. So, climbing up, we gradually managed to slip the throne off the tabernacle, having taken out the altar-stone. We then got down ; and whether the angels, spreading their wings underneath, took part of the weight away or not, we carried it quite easily to the choir, where, resting it on the floor, we enveloped the whole in a blanket which we covered again with a sheet. The tabernacle was next taken in the same manner, and, reciting the 'Adoremus,' 'Laudate,' 'Adoro Te,' we passed with our precious load through the cloisters into the garden. It was a lovely moonlight night, and our little procession, winding its way through the garden paths, reminded us of the Levites carrying away the tabernacle, when attacked by the Philistines. We soon came to the place, where the two 'Royal Engineers'—for so they had styled themselves (Dame Teresa and Dame Bernard)—were putting all their strength into breaking an iron bar in two, a task which they were forced to abandon. We reverently placed our burden on the edge of the cauldron, but found it was too small. Almost pleased at the failure, we once more shouldered the tabernacle, raising our eyes instinctively to the dark blue sky, where the pale autumn moon shone so brightly, and the cry of 'Pulchra ut luna' escaped from our lips, as our hearts invoked the aid of Her, who was truly the tabernacle of the Most High. As we gazed upwards, where the first bright stars glittered among the small fleecy clouds, wondering at the contrast of the quiet beauty of the heavens and the bloodshed and carnage on earth, a strange cloud, unlike its smaller brethren, passed slowly on. It attracted our attention. In all probability it was formed by some German shell which had burst in the air and produced the vapour and smoke which, as we looked, passed gradually away. We then re-formed our procession and deposited the tabernacle in the chapter-house for the night. Needless to say, it takes less time to relate all this than it did to do it, and numberless were the cuts, blows, scrapes, and scratches, which we received during those hours of true 'hard labour'; but we were in time of war, and war meant suffering, so we paid no attention to our bruises.

Our fruitless enquiries for a means to get news of Lady Abbess were at last crowned with success. Hélène, the poor girl of whom mention has been already made, and who now received food and help from the monastery, came, on Sunday afternoon, to say that two of her brothers had offered to walk to Poperinghe next day, and would take whatever we wished to send. After matins, Mother Prioress made up two big parcels, putting in all that she could possibly think of which might give pleasure to the absent ones. The next day was spent in expectation of the news we should hear when the young men returned.

Breakfast was not yet finished, when the portress came in with a tale of woe. One of our workmen was in the parlour, begging for help. During the night a bomb had been thrown on the house next to his; and he was so terrified that, not daring to remain in his own house any more, he had come with his wife and four little children to ask a lodging in our cellars. For a moment Reverend Mother hesitated; but her kind heart was too moved to refuse, and so the whole family went down into the cellar underneath the class-room, which was separated from the rest, and there remained as happy as could be. We were soon to feel the truth of the saying of the gospel, 'What you give to the least of My little ones, you give it unto Me.'

In the afternoon, we heard that the cab-driver, who had been to the convent on Friday, had spread the news that he had been ordered to Poperinghe the next day, to bring back the Lady Abbess and nuns. What had happened? Could they not remain in their lodgings? Did they think that the bombardment had stopped—just when it was raging more fiercely than ever—when, every day, we thought we should be obliged to flee ourselves? They must be stopped—but how? Hélène, who was again sent for, came announcing her two brothers' return. Mother Prioress asked if it would be too much for them to go back to Poperinghe to stop Lady Abbess from returning. They, however, declared they would never undertake it again, the danger being too great, and it being impossible to advance among the soldiers. Mother Prioress then determined to go herself, asking Hélène if she would be afraid to go with her to show the way. Hélène bravely replied that she was not afraid and would willingly accompany Mother Prioress. As usual, Mother Prioress would allow none of us to endanger our lives. She would go herself—and on foot, as the price demanded for the only carriage available was no less than 40 francs. In vain we begged her to let one of us go. It was to no purpose; and on Tuesday morning she started off, accompanied by Hélène, leaving the community in a state of anxiety impossible to describe. 'Would she be able to walk so far?' we asked ourselves. 'What if a bomb or shell were to burst on the road?' 'Would she not probably miss Lady Abbess' carriage?' We were now truly orphans, deprived both of our Abbess and our Prioress, and not knowing what might happen to either of them. After an earnest 'Sub tuum' and 'Angeli, Archangeli,' we went about our different tasks; for we had promised Reverend Mother to be doubly fervent in her absence. At 11 o'clock we said the office and afterwards sat down to dinner, for which no one felt the least inclined. The latter was not yet finished, when there was a ring at the door-bell, and in a few moments our Prioress stood before us. We could hardly believe our eyes. She then related her adventures which, for more accuracy, I give from her own notes:—

'When I heard the door shutting behind me, and the key turning in the lock, in spite of all my efforts, the tears came to my eyes. I was then really out of the enclosure—back again in the world—after twenty-seven years spent in peaceful solitude. The very sight of the steps brought back the memory of the day when I mounted them to enter the Monastery. I hesitated . . . There was still only the door between us, but no! my duty lay before me. I must prevent Lady Abbess returning; so, taking courage, I started off with Hélène, who was trying all she could to console me. I followed her blindly. As we advanced, the traffic increased more and more. Motor-cars, cavalry, foot-soldiers, cyclists, passed in rapid succession. On the pavement, crowds of fugitives blocked the passage. Old and young, rich and poor, alike were flying, taking only a few small packets with them — their only possessions. Mothers, distracted with grief, led their little ones by the hand, while the children chattered away, little knowing the misery which perhaps awaited them. And the soldiers! they never ceased. The Allies, in their different uniforms, passed and repassed in one continued stream, while the motor-cars and bicycles deftly wended their way between soldiers and civilians. I was stupefied, and thought at every moment we should be run over; but my companion, amused at my astonishment, assured me there was nothing to fear. We had called on the burgomaster for our passports; but he was absent, and we had been obliged to go to the town hall. After that, I called on M. le Principal du Collège Episcopal, our chaplain, to state that it was impossible to obtain a carriage (as I had arranged with him that morning), owing to our poverty, and that I should therefore be obliged to go on foot. He approved of our undertaking, and even advised me to take the whole community straight away to Poperinghe. I told him I must first prevent Lady Abbess from coming back; but that, once at Poperinghe, I intended certainly to look out for a convent which would receive us all. The British ambulance was established in the college, and it seemed really like barracks.

'Once in the street again, I heard, click! clack!! the British soldiers were shooting at a German Taube passing over the town. We hastened on. Many houses were already empty—nearly all the shops were closed. Here and there a heap of ruins showed where a shell had made its way, while out of the broken windows, the curtains blowing in the wind showed the remains of what had once been sumptuous apartments. We soon left the station behind us, and continued on the main road, with here and there a few houses which seemed more safe by being out of the town; yet some of them had also been struck. The regiments filled the road more numerously than ever, while the unfortunate fugitives, with a look of terror on their pale faces, fled from the doomed city. Some, who had left days before, were venturing back again in the hope of finding their homes still untouched. We continued our way, stopped now and then by some unfortunate creature, asking where we were going, and relating in return his story of woe. Suddenly I heard myself called by name. "Dame Maura! Yes, it is really she!" and, at the same moment, Marie Tack (an old pupil) flew into my arms. Her brother, who accompanied her, now came forward, and took great interest in everything concerning the convent. "Well!" he said, "we are benefactors of the Carmelites at Poperinghe—my brother even gave them their house. Say that it is I who have sent you, and you will surely be well received." I thanked him for his kindness and we parted, they returning to Ypres, where they had not dared to sleep. In my heart I sent a grateful aspiration towards the Divine Providence of God, which thus gave me this little ray of hope. Meanwhile, the parcels we were carrying began to weigh more and more heavily on us. We helped each other as best we could, as I saw that poor Hélène was almost out of breath, having taken the heaviest for herself. The roads also were very bad, and we could hardly advance owing to the mud. At length, after walking two hours, we saw the steeple of Vlamertinghe in the distance. It was time, for I felt I could not go farther. I remembered that Louise Veys (another old pupil) lived at Vlamertinghe, though I had forgotten the address. I asked several people in the streets if they could direct me, but I received always the same answer: "I am sorry not to be able to oblige you, Sister. I am a stranger, I come from Ypres—from Roulers—from Zonnebeke." At last, I ventured to ring at the door of one of the houses. It happened to be the very one I was looking for. Louise, who was at the ambulance, came running to meet me, with Mariette and Germaine Tyberghein, and Marie-Paule Vander Meersch. The latter told me that the church of their village, Langemarck, was burnt, and she feared that their house, which was close by, would have met with the same fate. At this moment, her sister Claire, who had remained with the wounded soldiers, came running in, crying out: "Lady Abbess is here, and Dame Josephine."—"Where?" I exclaimed. Instead of answering, she took me by the hand, and we both ran out to where a cab was standing. I flew to the door, and was soon in Lady Abbess' arms. I could hardly restrain my tears. How was it then that the carriage on its way from Poperinghe to Ypres had stopped just in front of the Veys' house, when neither the driver nor anyone else knew to whom it belonged, or still less that I was there? Once again Divine Providence had come to our help, otherwise we should have missed each other. The cabman, who had innocently been the means of our happy meeting, by stopping to get refreshments, now appeared. I explained that it was an act of the greatest imprudence to conduct Lady Abbess to Ypres; but he would listen to nothing—meaning to go. He declared the danger was far greater at Poperinghe, and then drove away with Mother Abbess to Ypres, leaving me in consternation. Mariette and Germaine Tyberghein offered me their carriage, to return to Ypres. It was soon ready, and we started back once more. Half-way to Ypres, we saw the other cab again stationary, and a British officer talking to the nuns through the window. We called out to our coachman to stop, knocking at the window with might and main. All was useless. The noise of the innumerable horses, provision and ammunition carts, passing, deafened him, and he continued peacefully, quite unaware that anything had happened. When we arrived at Ypres, the Germans were shelling it in real earnest. I wished to go back again, to stop Lady Abbess at any price, but was not allowed. They said no one would be permitted to come into the town, and that the other cab would probably have been sent back.'

This day was not to pass without another surprise; for what was our astonishment, at about eight o'clock, to see Dame Placid once more in our midst! The officer whom Mother Prioress had seen talking through the carriage-window, had said that on no account could Lady Abbess think of going on to Ypres, which was actually being bombarded. The cab had thereupon gone back to Poperinghe; but Dame Placid had alighted, and come to Ypres on foot. We crowded round her to get news of all that had happened during the last four days, which seemed like four weeks. After we had related all that had passed in the Monastery since her departure, Dame Placid told us in return what she had gone through. On the Friday afternoon, when our poor refugees had driven to Poperinghe, they went straight to the Benedictine Convent, making sure they would be received without any difficulty. But alas ! the Monastery was full of soldiers, and no less than fifty other fugitives were waiting at the door. From there, they drove to the Sœurs Polains where, also, every corner was taken up—then they went on to a private house, but always with the same result, until at last some one directed them to La Sainte Union, where they found a lodging. It had been pouring rain the whole time, and they were all cramped and cold. Poor Lady Abbess missed so much the little comforts she had had at the Abbey, and finally resolved to return to Ypres, with the result we know.

What could we now do to help her ? It was decided that Sister Romana should go back with Dame Placid to see if she could not be of use. The two fugitives left at about 4 o'clock, pushing before them a kind of bath-chair filled with packets and parcels for Lady Abbess and the old nuns. A rather strange equipment, which was doomed never to reach its destination. Having, with the greatest difficulty—owing to the condition of the roads—arrived at Vlamertinghe, they were stopped by several regiments passing. They waited, waited, waited, till at last an officer, seeing their distress, gave a signal, and the soldiers halted to allow them to cross. Despairing of ever reaching Poperinghe with their load, they called at the house where Mother Prioress had been received that morning, and begged to leave the little carriage and its contents there. They then walked on more easily, and were able to get to Lady Abbess before nightfall.

CHAPTER V

THE BOMBARDMENT

To return to the Abbey. Everything had become suddenly animated there; for, at the departure of Dame Placid and Sister Romana, Reverend Mother Prioress had declared that we should all follow, taking advantage of the occasion, as there was a cessation of hostilities for the moment. In vain some of us begged to be allowed to remain behind; but we had all to make our last preparations and go. When, however, the packages turned up, each bigger than the other, we looked at one another in dismay. How should we ever drag such a load with us? Dame Columban and Dame Bernard offered to try to find a workman to help us, and their offer was finally accepted. What happened they record.

'Mother Prioress gave us her blessing, and let us out of the enclosure door. Oh dear! What a sensation! Happy prisoners for so many years, we now found ourselves in the streets. With a shudder, we started on our errand. We had not gone a hundred paces, when, whizz . . . bang! a shell passed over our heads; a moment after, whizz . . . bang, another—then another—and another. Half-way down the street, a British officer on horseback cried out to us: "Mes Sœurs . . . à la maison." Where were we to go? We knew no one. We looked round to find a place of refuge; and, seeing a man standing on his doorstep, timidly asked if we might take shelter there. He willingly agreed, seeming only too delighted to bid us welcome. As soon as the officer had vanished, we asked our kind host if he could tell us where the workman (Chinchemaillie) we were seeking lived, and on being directed to his abode, we left the house. Once more in the street, we hurried on. While crossing the Grand' Place, a perfect hail of shells and shrapnel came down on all sides. Explosion followed explosion. The soldiers and civilians crouched down by the side of the houses whenever a shell burst; but we, ignorant of the great risk we were running, walked bravely on. At length we concluded we must have taken a wrong turning; so, meeting a pale-faced gentleman, we asked him if he would be so kind as to put us on the right road again. He was hurrying along, burdened with parcels of all sizes, and carrying a jug of milk. When we spoke to him, he seemed almost dazed. "Yes, Sisters," he answered ". . . certainly . . . but . . . the Germans have just shelled my house . . . I am running to save my life." We understood then why he looked so disturbed; offering our deepest sympathy, we begged him not to trouble. Recovering himself, he assured us that he was going our way, and would willingly accompany us. We took some of his parcels from him, and went along. At a turning in the street we parted, having received further directions from him and thanked him for his kindness. Another man, having overheard our conversation, came forward, and offered to conduct us to the house in question. We went on, passing several buildings which had been much injured, and finally, the bombardment raging all the time, arrived at our destination, only to hear that the workman had left the town in the morning, and had not been able to re-enter it. The people of the house showed us the greatest kindness, especially on hearing who we were, and insisted on our spending the night in their cellar, saying it was far too dangerous to go out again. We thanked them for their offer, but of course set off again for the Monastery. Just as we arrived at the Grand' Place, Hélène, who had already rendered such valuable services to the community came running towards us. She was breathless and almost crying, having been searching for us everywhere; we had been out so long, and the bombardment had been so continuous, that the nuns thought we must have been killed. We soon got safely home, where we found everyone in a dreadful state of anxiety.'

On hearing the continual explosions, Mother Prioress and the community had knelt down by the enclosure door, to pray for the safe return of Dame Columban and Dame Bernard. As they delayed so long, Reverend Mother sent Edmund to ask Hélène to look for them. Having done so, Edmund returned and did his best to persuade the nuns that there was no need to leave the Abbey. 'You have your cellars to shelter you, why do you want to go? What will become of me, when you are gone? If a bomb falls on the convent, well, it will be the will of God. Why not die here as well as anywhere else?' We shall see later, that when the shell really did fall on the Abbey, the good man was anything but resigned to die. As he perceived that he gained nothing by his eloquence, he went out into the street, and soon returned with a soldier, to see if the new-comer might not be more successful. The soldier was at first rather bewildered at his new surroundings, being an English Protestant, but was soon set at ease on finding that we talked English. At this moment the two wanderers came back, and set everyone's heart at ease. Of course there was no longer a question of our leaving that night, especially as the soldier assured us that there was no danger that the Germans would get into Ypres, adding that our cellars would be proof against all their bombs. Edmund, by this time, was triumphant, and pulling out his cigar-case, offered it to the 'Tommy,' who insisted on his accepting a cigarette in return. Edmund then began to relate the story of his woes. 'What should I have to eat, if they were to go ? ' he exclaimed. ' Imagine. the other day the Sister brought me my dinner. What did I see ? I could hardly believe my eyes ! A piece of beef-steak. I sat down in high glee ; for I do not remember when I had had a piece before. What was my disappointment to find what I had taken to be a beef-steak was nothing else than a piece of fried brown bread. I could have thrown it in the fire.' The soldier then took his leave, though not before Mother Prioress had given him a badge of the Sacred Heart, which he promised to wear always as a souvenir of his visit to our Abbey. We took care, also, to give him as many apples and pears as he could put into his pockets.

The number of people seeking shelter for the night in the convent increased constantly. Already, some thirty persons had come ; some bringing their own mattresses, the others depending on our charity. We gave all that we had. In the end, no fewer than fifty-seven persons came for a night's lodging. Numberless poor came also during the day for food, for they could not find anything to eat in the town ; bakers, butchers, grocers—all had fled to save their lives. We were in the greatest necessity ourselves, but still gave to all who asked. We experienced the truth of our Lord's words, 'Give, and you shall receive,' when, a few days later, we were in the streets — without a house, without food, without money. It was then, indeed, that we received a hundredfold the charity we showed towards those who applied to us in their distress.

On the Wednesday morning, Our Lord gave us a little surprise. Our chaplain had been obliged to leave Ypres the evening before, to place the nuns who lived in his college in safety. But the Divine Master watched over us, and instead of the one Mass which we had lost, He sent us two French military priests to offer up the Holy Sacrifice for us. Reverend Mother presented her excuses for the poor breakfast they received—for we had nothing to give them but the bread which we had made ourselves out of meal, and some pears—asking their opinion of the situation. They strongly advised us to leave while there was yet time and enquired where we thought of going.

Mother Prioress told them that the Lady Abbess of Oulton Abbey in England had offered, from the very outset of the War, to take the whole community, but the great question was how to get so far. They said that we ought to apply to the British Command for help, expressing the opinion that the English ambulance, established at the college of which our chaplain was the President, would surely come to our assistance. They then left, saying how delightful it had been to have found such a peaceful spot in which to say Mass, after the noise and horrors to which they had been so long accustomed.

The day passed slowly. The Germans were gaining ground. The noise of the Allied guns was now deafening. We were obliged to leave all the windows ajar, to prevent the glass being broken by the shocks, which made the house tremble from the garrets to the cellar. Monoplanes and biplanes, friendly and hostile, passed continually overhead—the former chasing the latter, which were dropping bombs without end on the town. At last, two friendly aeroplanes undertook to mount guard, and remained continually hovering round and round; but even then, the Taubes came; and the fighting went on in the air, as well as on all sides of us. The risks of remaining were certainly great; and yet—why leave our Abbey, when it was still untouched? We were sure of a warm welcome at Oulton; but how could the whole community get there, and, above all, our beloved Lady Abbess? On the other hand, how were we to live in Ypres? Not only were we in danger of being killed at any moment, but there was no longer any means of getting food. For several days Edmund had, with the greatest difficulty, procured two pints of skimmed milk; but even this would soon cease. Again, there was certainly no more prospect of receiving any money in Belgium, where the banks had all been robbed. We had paid our debts prior to the commencement of hostilities; and so had very little money left. In the afternoon, Mother Prioress determined to go out and seek for information at the British Headquarters; for everyone seemed to have deserted the stricken town. She took Dame Columban and Dame Patrick with her. They went first to the college. At the end of the Rue St. Jacques, a French soldier gave a military salute and advanced towards them. It was one of the priests who had said Mass for the community in the morning. He accompanied the three nuns as far as the college, but told them that the ambulance had left during the night, which was a very bad sign; for when the wounded were removed, it showed that there was great danger. He also promised to attend the next morning at 5 o'clock to say Mass. It was notified that the Headquarters were to be found a mile and a half out of Ypres. The burgomaster had also left the town. Going to the houses of several influential people—M. and Mme. le Sénateur Fracy de Venbeck and Mme. Van den Berghe and others—friends of the Monastery, Mother Prioress and her companions found them all locked up, and the inhabitants gone. One big shop was burning, and the French soldiers were trying to put the fire out. A baker's establishment had a large hole in the roof. It was pouring rain, and the nuns had no umbrella; so they turned their steps homewards. But their mission was not to prove useless; for Divine Providence had arranged that they were to help one of His poor creatures. Having arrived at the Grand' Place, they were stopped by an English officer, who pointed to a cart, driven by a soldier, which was following them. In it was an old woman lying, apparently helpless. He explained to them that, passing by a deserted village, which had been destroyed by the Germans, he had found her lying in a ditch. He had lifted her into the cart and taken her along with him, and he now asked if the nuns could not direct him to some hospital or institute where she would be taken care of. They went with him as far as the Hospice, where the officials declared they had more work than they could possibly attend to; still, as Mother Prioress begged so hard, they took her in. The poor old woman was over ninety. How many are there who, like her, find themselves turned out of the little home, which had perhaps cost them their whole life's savings. Why should the poor, the aged, the infirm, the innocent, suffer to satisfy the ambition of the unjust? Truly, 'My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord.' In eternity, lost in the blissful contemplation of God's infinite perfections, we shall understand the wisdom of those things which now surpass our poor intelligence.

On Thursday morning, we arose at 4.30 from what might truly be styled 'our humble couch,' to be ready for the promised Mass at 5 o'clock. During the night, we had harboured the Sisters of Providence, who were leaving next day. Having waited half an hour, and no priest coming, we recited lauds, prime, and tierce. We again waited in all patience, but no one appeared. We could not miss Holy Mass and Communion—it was the only source of consolation left to us; besides, we never knew if, perhaps, we should live to see the following day. The regiment to which the priests belonged had probably been ordered off during the night—hence the reason of their non-arrival. At 7.30 Mother Prioress assembled us all at the enclosure door, and, leaving Edmund in charge of the convent, we put down our veils, and two by two, started for the Carmelite Convent, situated a little way down the street. There we learned that the nuns had left the day before. We were determined not to miss Mass at any cost, so continued as far as the Church of St. James, where we arrived in the middle of one Mass, after which we received Holy Communion, and then had the happiness of assisting at another Mass —celebrated also by a French chaplain, though not one of those who had been at the Abbey the day before. On our way home, we were met by a priest of the parish, who had served Mass for a long time in our chapel, when he was a young boy, and, returning to Ypres years after, had always remained attached to the community. He was touched to see us thus obliged to break our beloved enclosure, and spoke words of courage and consolation to us.

The day passed in great anxiety, relieved by one little incident, which, in spite of all our perils and troubles, afforded us amusement. Dame Columban, busy cooking in the kitchen, found no dishes coming from the scullery, where Sister Winefride now presided at the washing up. She looked in, asking when the things would be clean, and found the Sister, bending over a tub of boiling water, looking very tired and hot, and received an answer, that all would soon be finished. Some time passed, but no dishes came. Being at a loss to know the cause of the delay, she went once more to the scullery to enquire, and found things in exactly the same state as before. On asking what was wrong, Sister Winefride exclaimed, in a piteous tone of voice : ‘ Do you *really* think we are going this morning ? ’—‘ Of course not ! who said so ? ’ ‘ I don’t know, but I thought perhaps we might ; so, in order not to have too much to carry, I have put on two habits, two scapulars, two petticoats, and I *do* feel so hot ! If I may just go to our cell and change, I think I’ll get on better ! ’ Having, as may easily be imagined, obtained the permission, she soon came joyfully back to her work.

We no longer believed the assurance the British soldiers gave us, that we were quite safe, and we now set to work to lighten our packages as much as possible, only taking what was strictly necessary ; it being even decided that we should only take one breviary each, and leave the other three behind. There still remained a good deal to carry ; for we were to take some provisions, not knowing if we should find refuge at Poperinghe, or if we should have to go straight to England. It was absolutely necessary to find some means of carrying our packages, were it but a wheelbarrow. Mother Prioress now found a reward for her charity, for the poor workman, whom she had so kindly received with his family in the cellar, hearing of our distress, found a hand-cart, and, what was more, promised to push it for us.

The next day, Friday, we went out again to Holy Mass in St. James's, having had very few people in the cellar, for all those who could possibly leave the town had already done so. When we returned, Mother Prioress announced her decision to go to the Headquarters, and set off immediately, accompanied by Dame Patrick, without even taking her breakfast. The rest of the community went about their different occupations, until she should return. Nine o'clock struck, half-past nine, ten, half-past ten, still no Mother Prioress! To say we were anxious but feebly expresses our state of mind. The shells and bombs were flying in all directions; and the explosions—joined to the firing of the guns—resembled some huge machinery with its never-ceasing boom and crash.

We prepared the dinner, which consisted of salt herrings and fried potatoes; but there was no account of the Mother Prioress as yet. Each ring at the door made us crowd round in joyful expectation, but each time a disconsolate 'No' was all the answer we received from the portress. We recited Sext and None, but no Mother Prioress as yet! We consulted together as to what should be done. Some thought Reverend Mother must have been kept—others that she had perhaps found a motor-car, and had seized the opportunity to go to Poperinghe to see Lady Abbess. The dinner was spoiling on the fire, yet no one cared to sit down to eat. The bell rang, but we scarcely had the heart to answer it—we had been disappointed so often. We felt sure we should only hear another 'No.' Suddenly a joyous ringing of the little hand-bell, which had served alike to announce the Divine Office, and to warn us of German Taubes passing overhead, brought everyone to their feet, and we soon crowded round our dear Prioress to beg her blessing, asking all together for an explanation of her long absence. For greater surety we shall cite her own notes:—

‘ The Headquarters had left the town, we had therefore a long way to go. In town, there was ever the same movement of troops, but the aspect seemed still more mournful. The shells had begun their work of destruction on the Grand' Place. A corner of the Halles had been struck. A house had received a bomb on the roof, which, penetrating the building, carried away half of the front, making its way through ceilings and floors, throwing the furniture to right and left, carrying chairs down into the very cellar. The people standing around were looking on aghast. We passed on, but soon a poor woman stopped us : “ And you Sisters, from where do you come ? ”—“ We are the Irish Dames of St. James's Street.” “ Oh yes ! I know the convent well. Are you also leaving ? ”—“ I am afraid we shall be obliged to do so ! ”—and we continued our walk. We had already turned off into another street, when we heard hurried steps behind us, and some one crying out : “ Sisters, Sisters ! Zusters, Zusters ! ” It was the good woman again, with her kind face, her big handkerchief round her head, and her blue Flemish apron. "Zuster! Don't leave the town, come home with me, we are poor, but still you can have my house and all I have."—"Good woman," I said, taking her two hands, "thank you a thousand times, do not be anxious for us. Our Lord will take care of us." I could have kissed the dear creature then and there. We could not stop. Soon a crowd blocked our passage. "A shell struck here last night" they explained to us—it was the Cercle Catholique — "and penetrated into the cellar where a poor man had taken refuge with his three children, thinking he would be more protected here than in his own home, and there is his house (just two buildings farther on) untouched. The man has his hand off, two children are killed, and the third, a girl, is dying!"

'By this time we had made our way through the crowd. The fugitives were continually passing, leaving homes and all behind. At length we arrived at the residence of the staff officers. We explained our case to one of them, who received us very courteously, and who told us the best thing to do would be to address ourselves to General Sir Douglas Haig. An orderly informed him that Sir Douglas had left for Brielen. The officer advised us to go there. It was already 8.30, and we had still a good hour's walk before us. The road resembled that to Poperinghe. One must have seen the continual passage of troops, motor-cars, horses, fugitives, in the narrow lanes, the roads inches thick with mud, to have a true idea of it. Here and there a house struck by a shell, or bespattered with mud almost to the roof, gave an indescribable air of sadness to the surroundings; while a bouquet of flowers, or an odd *bibelot* discarded in a shop-window, remained as a last souvenir of the joys and prosperity of our brave little Belgium. Brielen now came in sight. We stopped before the Calvary, erected at the entrance to the cemetery, and then paid a visit to the church. On coming out, we met the Curé of the village, who interested himself in our trials and sorrows. We then asked the way to the Headquarters, where we found it was impossible to see Sir

Douglas. His aide-de-camp gave us some rather vague information, but kindly offered to get us seats in a motor-car that was leaving for Poperinghe. It did not start, however, till midday, and even then I could not go without telling the community at Ypres. We set out on our way back to Ypres. Just outside the village a poor woman, all in tears, stopped us, showing us a big cavity which a shell had just made in the ground by her farm. " I should have been killed," she exclaimed, " except for the brave English soldiers, who, seeing the shell coming in my direction, had just the time to take me up and push me into the farm, but my cow is gone ! Our little farm was all our fortune ! " and she wiped away the tears with a corner of her apron. Poor dear ! How many are there still more unfortunate than she ! As we approached the town, the whistling shriek of the shells became more distinct ; the Germans were bombarding Ypres as hard as they could. We found ourselves almost alone in the streets. Here and there a few soldiers remained in the doorways of the houses. A shell flew straight over us !

What a protection of Divine Providence! A few steps off a building was struck, and we just escaped getting a shower of bricks and glass on top of us. "Come to the other side!" Dame Patrick called out. We crossed over, murmuring aspirations all the time. A little farther on another shell burst, and the house we had just passed fell a heap of shapeless ruins. We hastened our steps to get out of the street, which seemed to be the chief point of attack. We then breathed more freely, till—arrived at the Grand' Place—we were welcomed by a regular shower of shells which flew in all directions. Happily we had almost reached our destination, though, had it not been for Dame Patrick, I should never have known my way, but should probably have passed by the Monastery. At the door we met two brave Britishers whom I told to come into the parlour, where they would be more out of danger. They did not feel afraid, and said they were sent to search for some bread; for they could not get any in the town. I gave them some of the provisions which we were to take with us, with a little pot of butter, and—what I knew they liked so much—as many pears as they could carry. They were delighted, and so were we. We then talked of the war, and the old story came back again, the hope so cherished by all, and yet also not realised: "Oh! it will soon be over. We'll be home for Christmas!" '

Our poor dinner was now served, the last we were to take in the dear old home. The reading was made aloud as usual. The subject was 'Holy Poverty'—truly appropriate for the times and surroundings. The last words which the reader pronounced before the signal was given, were: 'The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away! May His Holy Name be blessed!' Had we prepared the reading beforehand, it could not have been better chosen. Our dear Lord had truly given us our Abbey, and had made it withstand the course of years, with all the changes of government, wars, and revolutions, which had swept over Belgium, especially Flanders—and now He was taking it away. May His Holy Name be blessed!

CHAPTER VI

FLIGHT

DURING dinner the bombardment had been at its height. In that short half-hour almost twenty shells had burst quite close to us. It was our side of the town that was being attacked—already a poor woman, begging for something to eat, had told the portress that the roof of the college was struck. Mother Prioress, deaf to all entreaties, said that everyone without exception was to be ready at 2 o'clock. We went about, looking—perhaps for the last time—at the dear old scenes, which we had thought to leave only when death should knock at our door.

We had already placed on every window of the convent a paper badge of the Sacred Heart, and lastly erected a niche outside one of the garret windows, in which we put the miraculous statue of Our Lady of the

Angels, which had remained unhurt outside the Monastery in the siege of Ypres, in 1744. We had done all we could and must now abandon all, leaving everything under the double protection of the Mother and the Son.

A little after 2 o'clock the hand-cart came round to the door. All the packages could not fit in it, in spite of Reverend Mother having made us take out nearly all we had gathered together; for she had learnt by experience, in carrying the things she had prepared for Lady Abbess as far as Vlamertinghe, three days before, the difficulties of walking so far, and carrying a heavy parcel at the same time. The enclosure door was then fastened on the inside, and all other important rooms or cupboards being likewise locked, we passed with a last farewell through the long-loved choir, which had known the joys and sorrows of our whole religious life.

We then went through the outer church into the sacristy, locking the door of the grille behind us. There was but one more door which separated us from the outside world—one door more! and we should be out of our enclosure, perhaps never more to return! There was a pause in our sad procession—the key was not there. Our Lord watched over us once more; for, had we then continued in our procession, some of us would inevitably have been badly hurt, if not indeed killed. After a few minutes' waiting, the key was brought, and already placed in the keyhole, when a loud explosion, accompanied by a terrific crash which shook the entire building, laid us all prostrate . . . Bewildered, rather than afraid, we arose, and saw, through the window, a shower of bricks and glass falling into the garden. The first—though not the last—shell had struck our well-loved Abbey.

We now realised that there was no time to waste. Already Edmund was screaming out from the other side of the still-locked door. 'Why don't you come? I told you, you should have left long ago. The convent is struck! We shall all be killed if you don't make haste!' The door was opened, and with an indescribable feeling of horror, mingled with uncertainty, we went out. In the street we raised our eyes in one sad farewell to our beloved Monastery; and there, out of the cell windows, principally that of Mother Prioress, a cloud of vapour and smoke told us of the passage of the shell; while the remains of the garret windows overhead and other débris of slates, bricks, wood and glass, strewn on the pavement, proved without a doubt, that Divine Providence had truly intervened in allowing the little delay in the sacristy, but for which we should have been just on the spot when all this had happened. A cry of anguish arose from our hearts as, hurrying along the deserted street, we saw our convent thus apparently burning.

Half-way down the street, another explosion behind us made us look round to see if the Abbey had again been struck, but no! this time it was the Institut Saint-Louis, just in front. Turning the corner, we saw some 'Tommies' scrambling out of a house which had also been shelled. As we stumbled over the bricks which covered the road, Edmund hurrying us on for bare life, one of the soldiers caught sight of us, and calling out to another to come to help 'the Sisters' he threw down the bundle he was carrying, and seizing two of ours, he walked along with us, his comrade doing the same. We shall continue the narrative from the notes of Dame Patrick :—

'As we were nearing the Rue de Lille, where the shells were falling thickly, two soldiers came forward to help us with our packages. We chatted as we hurried along, stopping every one or two minutes, to avoid a shower of bricks, as we heard a shell hiss over our heads and fall on one of the houses by us. One of us remarked to the soldiers : " It is very kind of you to help us." To our delight they answered, " It is our same religion, and our same country." They were both Irish Catholics—one from Kerry, the other from Belfast. When we reached the outskirts of the town they were both obliged to turn back, not having leave to quit Ypres. The Kerry man left us hurriedly ; but our man from Belfast ventured a little farther, though in the end he thought it wiser to return to his regiment. So we shook hands with him, and thanked him heartily, wishing him good luck and a safe return to dear old Ireland ! Our good Mother Prioress had a bag of pears in her hand, so she said to him :

" Here, take these pears and eat them, and we will pray for you." But he turned away, and said, " No, no, keep them for yourselves." Here the poor fellow broke down and cried. He hurried away, waved his hand, and wished us God-speed. I happened, during this little scene, just to have moved on, thinking Mother Prioress was by me. However, on looking round, I saw she was some distance behind, so I walked back to join her. To my surprise, I found her weeping. I felt very shaky myself, but did not want to seem so. I jokingly said, " Oh ! Mother Prioress, what is the matter ? " Then she told me what had happened, and said, " I could keep up no longer when I saw that dear, kind, genuine Irish-hearted man break down—how I wish I could know his name ! " " Come along," I said, " let us hope that one day we shall find it out, but don't cry any more or you'll have me joining in too." I then thought on my brave, tender-hearted countrymen who had left home and country to serve in the British army as Belgium's friends and protectors, and I felt proud and happy that we Irish Benedictines should have fallen in so often with

Irishmen, always meeting with the same kind-heartedness.'

We had left the town in a terrible state. Through several streets which we passed, we could not see the other side on account of the clouds of smoke and dust, occasioned by the bursting of the shells and the falling buildings. Several telegraph posts lay across the road, with the wires hopelessly twisted and broken. Soldiers were running to and fro, propping up walls which had been shaken by an explosion in the vicinity, or making for some new ruin to see if they could be of any use. At last leaving the terrible sight behind us, we passed by the Rue d'Elverdinghe, on to the road leading to Poperinghe. Here we picked up the good fellow who was pushing the hand-cart. He took some more packages, tying them all together with a stout rope to prevent them falling off. His wife and little children were also there, for they dared not remain in the town. How glad were we now that Reverend Mother had listened to our chaplain, when he told her not to wait till the last moment to place dear Lady Abbess in safety. What would she have done in the midst of those dreadful shells, which, although we had left the town far behind us, still continued—though we heard them not so loudly now—to fly on their errand of destruction towards poor, unfortunate Ypres.

There is no need to describe the marching of the troops as they passed us on the way, as Mother Prioress has already mentioned it in her notes. What left the deepest impression on our memories was the thick slimy mire we had to wade through. In some places it was so bad that it was almost impossible to get on—we seemed to slide back two steps for every one that we made forward. We trudged bravely on, but before we had gone a quarter of the way some of us were already *au bout*. We, who for years had not walked more than six or seven times round our little garden, were certainly little fitted to go some nine miles in that dreadful mud, and carrying parcels which, by this time, seemed to weigh tons. At last Vlamertinghe came in sight. If only it had been Poperinghe! We were not even quite half-way. We could hardly push through the crowds of fugitives, each with his or her bundles of different colour, shape, and size. Some men had four packages, two in front and two behind, slung over their shoulders; others were bent in two with huge sacks on their backs; others pushed wheelbarrows or perambulators in front of them; while some were content with a little bundle tied up in a pocket-handkerchief. One respectable-looking man carefully hugged two umbrellas—were they his only treasures? We passed through the village, and on, on, on! always in company of troops, motor-cars, and refugees. The latter accosted us from time to time to ask who we were and where we came from. They nearly all seemed to know the Iersche Damen van S. Jacob's Straat! Several officers and soldiers saluted us also as we passed. If only the driver of some motor-car would have given us a lift, but they flew past so quickly—they probably did not even see us. The mason's little children took turn by turn to have a ride on the hand-cart, seated on the top of all the bundles, while the others hung out of the poor mother's arms, who cheered them on, and told them wonderful tales in Flemish. One little boy was squeezing an almost imperceptible black puppy, which he would not let go for all the world. While the young gentleman was having his turn for a ride there was a sudden halt on the way. The wee doggie had managed to wriggle out of his master's tight embrace and, making good use of his long-sighed-for liberty, had fallen out of the cart. Luckily, no bones were broken, owing to the soft carpet of mud into which he sank. Indeed, the poor cart was obliged to stop more than once, either to make way for two regiments who were marching in different directions, or for two or three motor-cars passing all at once, and, often enough, getting literally 'stuck in the mud,' or to give a rest to Edmund and the workman, who had a hard time of it.

It was now getting dark, and a thick mist was rising. The sound of the firing was getting more and more feeble as we left Ypres farther and farther behind. From time to time, a dead horse, stretched out in the ditch or in a field close by, would make us turn away from the mournful sight. We walked and walked—would we never arrive at our destination ? It became darker at every moment—we were obliged to keep well together, for fear of being left behind. The trees which lined the road loomed out as though they had been some unearthly spectres, with their leafless branches like gaunt arms uplifted towards the sky to call down vengeance on the earth ; while, magnified through the thick mist, the moon tinged with red seemed to reflect the bloodshed and carnage of the battle-field.

At last we caught sight of a feeble glimmer which—unlike the lights of the motor-cars, as they sped along, throwing an electric flash into our dazzled eyes and then vanishing, leaving the darkness more intense—grew brighter and brighter as we advanced. Could it really be Poperinghe ? We hastened on, almost forgetting our fatigue. Yes, we were truly there—it was Poperinghe ! But where were we to turn our steps ? Soon we were surrounded by a crowd. Soldiers and civilians, men and women, looked with commiseration on this new group of fugitives who added to the number of those who already filled the town. Reverend Mother asked to be directed to the Carmelites, remembering the recommendation of Mr. Tack. Two girls offered to conduct us there. At this moment a gentleman came forward asking what we desired (we only discovered later that it was the Judge). In a few words, Mother Prioress explained the situation. On hearing mention made of La Sainte Union, where Lady Abbess had taken refuge, he informed us it was quite close at hand, that if we wished he would conduct us there first; and in case there should not be room for us all, he would undertake to find us lodgings. Needless to say, we willingly accepted the proposal, and in a few minutes we found ourselves in a cheery little parlour, awaiting the Superioress' decision. The permission was accorded at first rather hesitatingly, and for one night only. Was it astonishing? The poor nuns had just given up the school premises to the French Ambulance; they had also given refuge to a community from Oostnienukerke, who were afterwards rejoined by their Sisters from Passchendaele, and now we arrived also! However, when they discovered that we really were what we made ourselves out to be, and not German spies, or vagrants—and especially as, during the conversation, one of the elder nuns found that she had formerly been the mistress of Mother Prioress when she had been to the convent at Hazebrouck in preparation for her first Communion, the community having been expelled from France eleven years before—they soon changed, and for a whole fortnight showed us every kind of hospitality.

Now Dame Placid and Sister Romana heard the news, and came running down to welcome us, then Sister Magdalen and dear Dame Josephine. The meeting was a happy one, which however soon changed to sadness, when we related what had happened to the old Abbey. We were impatient to see our beloved Lady Abbess. Soon our dear Prioress, who had gone first to break the news gently, reappeared, and we all trooped upstairs, little dreaming of the sad scene which that very little parlour would witness in less than a fortnight's time. Lady Abbess was at once both anxious and pleased; so, after an exchange of greetings, and having received her blessing, we retired. We now began to realise what we had done.

It was all so strange; we were now truly poor, not knowing what would befall us. 'Sacré Cœur de Jésus, j'ai confiance en Vous!' We were really and truly destitute of all human aid, and depended solely on our loving Father in Heaven for everything.

Soon the good nuns had prepared supper for us, after which we made a visit to the church, and then were not sorry to be shown the way to the dormitory. It had belonged to the children, who, owing to the war, had not returned after the holidays. Oh dear! Where were our cells? Here there were not even alcoves, but some pretty-looking curtains covering two sides of each bed. We were not even alone in the dormitory, several beds being already occupied. Suddenly, to our great surprise, Antoinette Doone, one of our old pupils, who had always remained especially attached to Mother Prioress, threw herself into Reverend Mother's arms saying that she also was stopping at La Sainte Union with her two servants. She was delighted at the idea of sharing the dormitory with her old mistresses. Truly the war brought about strange coincidences, and made us meet with devoted friends when we least expected it. Soon we were reposing on a soft mattress and spring bed, and unaccustomed to such luxury, as well as worn out by the fatigues of the day, we were not long in falling asleep.

CHAPTER VII

VISITING THE WOUNDED

IT was late the next morning when we awoke, for there were no guns to disturb our slumbers. However, we were up in time for the last Mass. Having breakfasted, we set to work to carry our parcels upstairs, and to clean our shoes, which, owing to our peregrinations, were hardly recognisable, being simply clotted with mire and dirt. This finished, we made our first visit to the wounded soldiers in the ambulance. What a scene of suffering met our eyes! If it made us realise, more than ever, that we had left our beloved enclosure, still it gave us an insight into human misery which we should never have had, had we remained peacefully in our Abbey. The *ensemble* was not yet organised, only those downstairs having bedsteads—the poor soldiers upstairs lying on straw on the floor. The impression made was ineffaceable. We now saw what war really meant, and we left, after having distributed little cakes, biscuits and sweets, with a promise to come back as often as we could.

Mother Prioress was now called for, to see Edmund and the poor family who had not been received in the convent, as the Superioress had been threatened with a summons if she received any refugees. They had been directed to the police station, where, having presented themselves, they had been placed in an inn, and had passed the night in an attic on some straw. They were also starving, having had nothing to eat. They were quickly given some of our provisions, and Mother Prioress paid the mason for his hard work of the day before. Being now a little consoled, he said he would go off with his wife and children to a village close by, to see if he would not be more successful in getting a lodging there. Edmund remained, lamenting loudly over his misfortunes. The chaplain of the community passing by, and hearing his sad tale, had compassion on the poor man, and told him he might sleep at his house, while the nuns arranged to give him his meals. After some days, however, he found the priest's house too far away from the convent, and so managed to get a bed in a baker's establishment just opposite.

Every morning we had the happiness of assisting at two or four Masses; for besides the Director of the community, whose Mass Edmund served, some French priests who were attached to the ambulance also requested permission to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. Reverend Mother arranged with the Superioress that we might go to the chapel when we liked to say our office, where—instead of stalls—turning the chairs to face each other, we improvised a choir, and recited the Benedictine hours with the usual ceremonies. We were, of course, obliged to advance the night office, saying vespers and compline at 2.30 and matins and lauds at 4.0, it being often necessary to bring the chairs close to the window to have light to finish, if, as it sometimes happened, we were unable to keep to the given hours.

On Sunday afternoon, eleven nuns from the Rue de Lille at Ypres came to beg a refuge. They were expelled French nuns of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who had devoted themselves since the outbreak of the war in our parts to tending the wounded soldiers. It was they who had had such a narrow escape when the Germans came to Ypres, whilst they had their convent full of Belgians. They told us afterwards how good their wounded had been, and how the greater part, as soon as they were well enough, used to come to Benediction and sing with the nuns.

Now, however, they brought sad news from the town, which was being bombarded worse than ever. They had been obliged to fly for their lives; one Sister had been killed by a bomb, a servant badly wounded, and their Superioress had stopped behind with two nuns, compelling the others to leave. They had at first taken the wrong road, going straight to the scene of battle; but being sent back by the British soldiers, they had made their way, as best they could, to Poperinghe. They had lost six of their number, not knowing what had become of them; seventeen had left the convent, and now only eleven had arrived at Poperinghe.

The next day our servant-man came round to say that he had received an invitation to go back to Ypres the following day with another man, who was willing to run the risk of returning. Needless to say we were delighted to have such a good chance of getting news about our Monastery; and all prayed for his safety. We anxiously awaited the result of this venture, hoping that he would be able to get into the convent, and that, above all, no harm would happen to him. True enough, he came back in triumph, dragging another huge parcel of things he had managed to secure for himself. The dreadful account he gave of the Monastery filled us with despair, for, according to his description, half the building seemed to have been destroyed. Happily, the person who had accompanied him called the next day, and told us that Edmund had greatly exaggerated the mischief done; and he hoped that if the Germans could be repulsed, we should be able to return in four or five days.

Mother Prioress determined to ascertain the truth of the case for herself. She accordingly made enquiries as to whether it would be possible to go to Ypres in a motor-car. M. Vander Meersch, a solicitor who lived near the Abbey, came to our help, and an officer was found who was willing to take two nuns with him. We begged our dear Prioress not to expose herself to such evident danger; but, as usual, she would not listen, and it was decided that Dame Placid should accompany her. God, Who ever protects those who put their trust in Him, arranged otherwise, and the motor-car was prevented from leaving Poperinghe. We heard afterwards that at the very time that they should have arrived, a bomb had fallen on another motor, and killed five officers.

During the next days, news poured in from Ypres. At one time, we heard that the Germans had been repulsed, and their guns captured, and that Ypres would soon be quite safe again; shortly afterwards, it was announced that the enemy was mercilessly bombarding the town, some houses were falling, others burning. We were more than ever convinced that we could believe nothing that we heard and must necessarily see for ourselves.

Besides, the guns which we had only heard feebly in the distance, on our arrival at Poperinghe, could certainly be heard far more distinctly now; were we going to be bombarded a second time? It really seemed probable, for German aeroplanes appeared in sight, apparently scrutinising the movements of the Allies, and had not that been the beginning of the hostilities at Ypres?

In the streets, the regiments passed and repassed—the poor, brave fellows marching off to the battle, and the others coming back from the trenches to have a well-merited repose. It was often touching to see how those who had not been ordered out would await the return of the troops, anxiously scanning the lines as they passed, and on perceiving a comrade, perhaps a 'chum,' coming back unhurt, they would run forward and give a hand-shake with a joyful greeting, as the horses trotted by. But alas! there were always a number of empty saddles, belonging to those who had been taken to the ambulance, or—worse still—left dead on the battle-field. The horses themselves seemed mournful, as they followed mechanically after the others, as though they felt it must be partially their fault that their dear masters were no longer there. Often, also, numbers of German prisoners would march past between two files of British or French soldiers on their way to the station.

Our poor wounded French soldiers were not forgotten. By this time things were arranged better; nearly all had beds now, some even sheets. And this was due to the unflagging devotion of three priests attached to the ambulance as infirmarians. They certainly preached to us a silent sermon of self-forgetfulness and heroic charity; and our greatest pleasure was to hear them relate all they had gone through since the War broke out. In the French army alone, 40,000 priests mixed with the common soldiers, the greater number being combatants. The brave wounded also gave us many a lesson, never finding fault with anything, never complaining of their dreadful wounds. And yet how horribly some of them were mutilated! A great number were obliged to have an arm or leg amputated—one had his lower jaw carried away—another, his whole face from below the eyes. Most of them were wounded in the head, which made them suffer dreadfully, some even being delirious. There were some who belonged to the highest aristocracy—Counts and Barons were there, lying on straw or hard stretchers; others again were quite young, only twenty or twenty-one. Yet all were patient, all courageous, all *sure* that in the end the Allies would win, and the Germans be defeated. The unfortunate victims who died of their wounds were carried out to a little hut or tent erected in the garden. As we passed by, we would lift up the curtain which hid them from view, and say a ‘ De profundis ’ for the repose of their souls. Sometimes as many as eleven or twelve lay there, awaiting the coffins which could not be made quickly enough. One poor Zouave, who had probably been dead some time before it was found out, lay there with his arms uplifted, as though he still held the gun, with which he would, even in death, lay low his enemy.

But we cannot do better than take from

the notes of Dame Teresa, who was so devoted in visiting the ambulance :—

'At Poperinghe we spent all our time making badges of the Sacred Heart for the wounded soldiers. Almost every day we went to visit them. This gave us the greatest joy. The first time we entered the large room No. 1, where they lay, some on beds, others on stretchers, we were struck with horror and pity. There they were, young men and middle-aged, from every department of France ; some had been struck on the head, others on the chest, back, or shoulders, or else wounded in the legs. And yet not one complaint escaped their lips—only one poor fellow, who was delirious, called out as we passed by : "My head, my head ! oh, if you only knew what it is to have such a headache." Another soldier, just twenty-one, said to us in the patois of the South of France, "Franche ! Franche ! shall I ever see thee again ! " We went from one room to another, speaking to each, and cheering them up. We gave them pears, and it used to be our greatest pleasure to peel them, cut them in small bits, and now and again we would put them in their mouths, when they were unable to move. They were as simple as children, and loved our visits. " Sister, you'll come back to-morrow won't you ? It is so nice to see you, it cheers us up ! " I remember one incident, which shows their simplicity. Dame Walburge and I had been going round, distributing small bits of pear, which they much relished as very comforting to their parched lips ; but there came a time when we had exhausted our last pear, and still many soldiers had not had a bit. Of course next day we would serve them the first ; but Dame Walburge whispered to tell me one poor fellow had been watching me so anxiously for some time. I turned towards him to say a little word of comfort, but he interrupted me, saying in a fretful, childish way : " Oh, Sister, and you have given me no pear, and I wanted one so badly ! " In vain we searched our pockets, all the while promising he should be served the first next day. He repeated : " It's to-night I wanted it." We left the room sadly, wishing, for once in our religious lives, that we had a penny to buy him a pear. But

Almighty God, Who is all-powerful, heard the prayer of His children; for hardly had I told this story to one of the nuns of La Sainte Union, than she gave me a pear, and though it was already dark, we ran back joyfully to our poor wounded soldier, who seemed dumb for joy, but his happy face rewarded us beyond words.

'The unselfishness of the soldiers towards each other was marvellous; once, while peeling a pear for a soldier—one who was eating a piece of bread—he said to me: "Sister, I am sure my neighbour would also like a piece." I turned to the other, who answered timidly: "Yes, I should like it; but see, Sister, I have a little bit of meat on my bread, and he has none, so give it to him!" Needless to say, I divided it between them.

'Sometimes they would give us a little money out of their purses to buy biscuits, or cheese, or, as they said, "something to eat." One Zouave asked us to buy him a pair of socks.

'At this French Ambulance we also had the joy of making the acquaintance of three soldier-priests, who daily said Mass at the convent, thus giving us the happiness of sometimes hearing five Masses a day. I do not quite remember the names of the priests. I think one was called M. l'Abbé Tecq, another M. l'Abbé Couq of Dijon, and the third was M. l'Abbé Louis Charbonnel of Avignon. This latter was very fond of Benedictines, and gave us a special blessing before leaving, assuring us that we should immediately feel "at home" among our Sisters at Oulton.

'These priests were more than devoted to the soldiers, administering the last sacraments, and bringing Holy Communion to them, no matter at what time of the day. The little badges of the Sacred Heart also did their work; all the soldiers asked to have them, and insisted on our pinning them ourselves on their clothes; the priests wore them, and distributed hundreds, so that we could scarcely keep pace with their fervour, except by working at them every free minute we had. Some of the infirmarians even asked to have a few to send away in their letters.

'They wrought many conversions—the soldiers all wanted to have them.'

Again there was dreadful news from Ypres. The hospital was entirely destroyed. The British soldiers had gone with their motor-cars to take away the four nuns, who still risked their lives by staying to tend the poor victims, who were daily struck down in or about the town. Four other nuns had been killed in their cellar. A priest carrying the holy oils to a dying person had been struck down in the street. The Germans had even made new bombs, bigger and more destructive than those used before. What should we do? Would it not be wiser to accept Lady Abbess of Oulton's kind invitation, and go straight on to England while there was yet time? But our Abbey! Why leave it, if we could possibly return?

We found ourselves surrounded at Poperinghe by every attention which charity could suggest; and although the community of La Sainte Union had often the greatest difficulty to provide for the increased number of fugitives, there being two other communities as well as ourselves, still we received everything that was possible in the circumstances. However, as the officer in charge of the ambulance demanded one thing after another for his soldiers, he came at last to claim the room which had been placed at our disposal. The Superioress was obliged to yield, and the 'chef' soon established the supplies of food in what had been our refectory. We were now forced to take possession of the nuns' refectory, going to our meals before or after theirs. We thus found ourselves at table not only with the two other communities above mentioned, but also with the servants of one of our old pupils, who were also stopping in the convent to help at the ambulance. We managed as best we could, and still kept up our tradition of entering in procession, saying the 'De profundis,' and then reciting the Benedictine grace before and after meals. This was not all. There was a door at one end, which led into the room given up to the soldiers; consequently, at any moment, one would appear in the refectory to fetch a loaf of bread, or some meat, &c., and then repass again on his way out. Once, when a priest came, Mother Prioress gave him a pear, as also to the soldier who came after him; but soon the Superioress put up a large screen, which enabled them to enter without disturbing the community. They had a very hard life. Often we saw their shadows through the mat glass as they stood at the windows, eating their dinners in the rain and snow.

And now Our Lord was preparing a cross which we had not counted on, and which added to the grief that already weighed down our hearts. Our poor dear Dame Josephine, already fifty-two years professed, now left us. Feeble and infirm, the shock had been too much for her. The want of good nourishment had also told on her—she was soon obliged to keep her bed, having caught cold. The doctor, on seeing her, declared the case dangerous, and proposed that she should receive the last sacraments. This took place on Friday, November 13, Feast of all the Saints of the Benedictine Order. Alas ! we little expected that another one would so soon increase their happy company. Saturday, our dear patient seemed to rally a little, and none of us believed the infirmarian, when, in the evening, she told us she was dying. However, Mother Prioress remained some time alone with Dame Josephine, helping her to renew her vows, and offer up holy aspirations. She herself did not think she was so bad; but, always ready to obey, she followed the prayers suggested by her whom she had known when she had been Sister Maura—a lively, fervent, eighteen-year-old postulant, and whom she had always cared for as a mother. Now that her dearly-loved little novice had grown into her Superioress, she submitted herself with child-like simplicity, asking her blessing morning and evening, thus edifying greatly the whole community. She therefore now made, when Dame Maura proposed it, her act of resignation, should God demand the sacrifice of her life.

Two of us offered to divide the night between us to watch by her bedside. After 1 A.M. she slept a little, though her breathing was difficult. At 2.30 she awoke, and seemed rather restless. Before going down in the morning, Mother Prioress paid Dame Josephine another visit; but we could no longer distinguish what she said. We replaced each other during the Masses; but about 7.30 everyone was called out of church, there being now no more doubt. The Superioress of the house knelt with Mother Prioress close by the bed, and several nuns of both communities joined their prayers to ours, during which our dearest jubilarian breathed forth her innocent soul. It was the Feast of the Dedication of the Churches. Our Lord had chosen the day Himself, for had she not passed her whole religious life in the service of the altar as sacristine ? And by a curious coincidence, in which we may again detect the loving attention of the Divine Master, the burial, settled at first for Tuesday, was put off till Wednesday, Feast of the Dedication of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Sad at any time, the loss of our dear Dame Josephine now appeared doubly so—in exile, and in the midst of so many other trials. She had truly ' chosen the better part,' and we felt a sort of relief to know that she had been spared the horrors which we should, in all probability, live to see. Every one showed us the kindest sympathy in our loss. Dame Aloysius and Dame Columban performed the last duties to the dear departed one, and laid her out in the same little parlour where she had come to welcome us, just nine days before, on the evening of our arrival. Every one came to pray by her corpse, all the nuns, the chaplain, even several of our old pupils, who, having taken refuge in Poperinghe, heard of our sad loss—and last of all, poor old Edmund who for a moment forgot his own troubles to grieve over dear Dame Josephine whom, like everyone else, he had esteemed and respected. Each, as they left the little room, where such a peaceful silence reigned, declared they had never before seen such a holy and happy death.

Thanks to the intervention of M. Vander Meersch, already mentioned, and who was a personal friend of the burgomaster of Poperinghe, Mother Prioress obtained permission to place the dead body, having previously secured it in a double coffin, in a private vault in the cemetery; so that if—which God grant—we are able to rebuild our Monastery at Ypres, we shall then lay dear Dame Josephine with her other religious Sisters.

We recited the Office of the Dead round the holy remains, in the convent chapel, and sang the Requiem Mass at the funeral. This latter should have really taken place in the parish church, but the Curé, kindly sympathising with our numerous trials, offered to perform it at the convent so that we should be thus enabled to keep our enclosure as much as possible. We sang the Mass (at which all attended) with great devotion, in spite of the severe colds we had all caught. At the moment of consecration, when, in deepest recollection, we adored 'Our Lord and our God,' Who thus deigned to come down from Heaven among His sorrowing children, the well-known hiss of a descending bomb made itself heard, and in the same moment a formidable explosion took place quite close to us. The Holy Sacrifice continued without interruption. It was only afterwards we heard that the Germans had aimed at the ambulance established, as has been said, in La Sainte Union. Missing us by a few yards only, the bomb had struck the house next door, doing, however, but little damage. Four girls of the Congregation of Our Blessed Lady carried the coffin to the cemetery, while the nuns of the house accompanied our community.

The sad little procession wound its way along the muddy streets, amidst troops of civilians and soldiers. Nearly all saluted as it passed. The prayers being sung at the grave, the coffin was deposited in the vault, and we returned silently, stopping to recite ' De profundis ' at the little portion of ground allotted to the dead nuns of La Sainte Union.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ATTEMPT TO REVISIT YPRES

When we arrived at the convent, we found that a soldier had called to say that a motor-car would be starting for Ypres at 4.30, but which would not return until the next day. We felt hardly inclined to accept the invitation, but dared not miss the opportunity which would perhaps not present itself a second time. Mother Prioress and Dame Placid decided to go, and to pass the night in the abbey and come back the following day in the motor. We were all so anxious at the idea that two of us, viz. Dame Columban and Dame Patrick, offered to go on foot to be able to help in case of danger. The narrative will be continued from the notes of Dame Columban and Dame Patrick :—

'We set off at 2.30 as we should, of course, take longer than the motor. Two of the servants of Madame Boone, who were also in the convent, accompanied us, to be able to see in what state her house was. At their suggestion we decided to follow the railway line, instead of going by the high road; and thus we were spared the dreadful mud and constant traffic we should otherwise have had. On our way we met many poor people who were flying from Ypres; for the Germans were still shelling it. They tried their best to dissuade us from our purpose, depicting in vivid colours the great danger we were incurring—we, however, continued on our way. Several aeroplanes passed overhead, one of which received a volley of shots, so we knew it must have been an enemy. Sad to say, it escaped untouched. As we advanced we heard the sound of the guns louder and louder, till at last we found ourselves once again in the noise and confusion we had left a week and a half ago. Our hearts beat faster as we began to distinguish in the distance the tower of St. Martin's and of the Hall; and we hastened our steps, wondering if the motor-car, which was to bring Mother Prioress and Dame Placid, were already there, and making plans as to what we should do for the night. The fugitives had told us that the Germans were principally shelling the station, so we determined to go round the town, and come in by the Porte de Menin which would bring us immediately to the Abbey. As we were thus settling everything in advance, we came to where the railway lines pass over the high road, and were about to continue by the latter, when a French policeman suddenly stopped us, asking where we were going. We bravely replied, "To Ypres!" What was our dismay when he politely informed us he was forbidden to allow anyone to enter the town. In vain we expostulated, saying how far we had come, that we only desired to see our Monastery once again, that it was quite impossible to walk back to Poperinghe that night. It was all useless. As we spoke, some poor persons endeavoured also to pass, but were sent back. We then asked the officer if he had seen a motor-car with two nuns in it. He replied in the negative, but promised to stop them should they pass. He tried to mend matters by explaining that he was obliged to obey orders, and that it was to prevent deserted houses being broken into and robbed that persons were not allowed to enter the town. "For," he said, "people pass by empty-handed in the morning, saying they want to see if their houses are still standing; they come back in the evening loaded with things; is it their own belongings they have, or some one else's?" This, however, did not console us, and we turned our steps disconsolately towards Poperinghe.

'It was nearly six o'clock. The cold wind beat pitilessly in our faces, for it was freezing hard. The stars were shining, but there was no moon, so the road was dark. Should we *ever* reach Poperinghe again? What if Mother Prioress and Dame Placid were waiting for us at the Abbey? They would assuredly think we were killed! . . . We walked slowly on, debating what was to be done. At last we decided to try to find a lodging for the night, and get into Ypres the first thing in the morning. We stopped at the first group of houses which came in sight. What was our joy to see a motor outside. Perhaps we could get a ride home. We addressed ourselves to the French soldier who was standing by, and asked if by chance he was going to Poperinghe that night. "Yes!" was the rather laconic reply. "And would it be possible to take us also?" That was another thing. We must wait for the officer, who would be back, perhaps, in half an hour, perhaps later. Then, as if to excuse his apparent unwillingness, the soldier told us they were strictly forbidden, under pain of thirty days' imprisonment, to take anyone in the motors, as it had been discovered that German spies had been acting as chauffeurs to several French officers. Did we look like German spies? Be that as it may, it was not inviting to think of waiting in the cold for half an hour or more, and then meeting with a probable refusal. We consequently returned to our first idea of getting a night's lodging. We knocked at the first door, but found the house full of French soldiers. We went farther on, and, through a window, saw some English "Tommies" seated round the fire with the members of the family. This looked more inviting. We pushed the door open (there being no sign of a bell or knocker), and at our enquiry, were told that the house was full, there being four officers lodging there, as well as the private soldiers. We asked if it would be possible to speak to an officer, and were requested to step inside. Our visit being announced, a cheery voice called out, "Entrez, mes Sœurs, entrez!" We entered the little room, and found ourselves in presence of four officers, who were actually engaged in making their tea, and who were more than delighted on learning our nationality. They were very interested in our story, and pressed us to take tea with them. We thanked them for their kindness, but refused, not wishing to deprive them of what they so well deserved. Two of them next offered to go in search of some means of conveying us back to Poperinghe, as we were not likely to find a lodging anywhere. They were also sure that the officer had never left with Mother Prioress, for—as one of them remarked—"Ypres is a very unhealthy place for the moment." After some time, the two returned, saying they had found a French vehicle, which would conduct us to within a mile of Poperinghe. So, thanking our kind hosts, we followed our two guides to the place where the carriage (if so we may call it, it being rather a closed cart, drawn by mules) was standing. The soldiers were busy unloading it. As we were talking, two lights appeared in the distance, which rapidly grew bigger and brighter, as a motor-car dashed past us. The two officers soon chased it, calling on the driver to stop. He accordingly slowed down, and we learned, to our great delight, that the officer (an English one this time) would take us straight to Poperinghe. We were soon spinning along the road, leaving Vlamertinghe, houses, carts, horses, soldiers, far behind us; and in a good quarter of an hour, we stopped at the door of La Sainte Union. We begged our kind benefactor to accept something for our drive; but he refused, saying he was only too pleased to have been able to render us this little service. As soon as we were safe inside, we were surrounded, all asking what had happened to us, for everyone had been more than anxious on our account, owing to the alarming news which was brought from Ypres. We related our adventures in a few words, and then had to go quickly upstairs to show ourselves to dear Lady Abbess, who was greatly troubled over our absence, and enquired constantly if we had yet arrived.

'In our turn we now desired to know what had happened to Mother Prioress and Dame Placid, so, during recreation, which we shared with the other nuns, refugees like ourselves, we heard of their doings. After going out in search of the officer who was to take them to Ypres, and waiting in the rain and cold, the soldier who had called in the morning found them and said the captain had been delayed, and would not leave before 4 or 4.30. They had then returned to the convent and set out once again, this time taking the key of the Abbey, which they had previously forgotten. Arrived in the market square, they saw a long row of motors drawn up, with soldiers busy taking off the cakes of mud and mire which literally covered them. In vain they looked for their driver. At this moment a regiment of Chasseurs

Français rode up four abreast. They had hardly gone when the Dragoons, with their uniform of pale blue and silver, galloped past also. This state of things lasted almost an hour. The captain not yet making any appearance, they had gone in quest of something to take with them to eat, in case no food should be found in Ypres. By a strange coincidence, on entering the shop, they were accosted by the manageress of one of the hotels of Ypres, who immediately recognised them. At last, on coming once more out into the square, the soldier met them again, saying that the bombardment was raging so fiercely that there was no question of leaving Poperinghe that afternoon. It was useless to think of sending after us, so every one had remained in the greatest anxiety until our return.'

CHAPTER IX

PREPARING TO START FOR ENGLAND

REVEREND MOTHER, despairing of getting into Ypres, was now determined to leave Poperinghe and go to England; but again the question presented itself—How were we to get there ? As the English officers had been so kind to us in our efforts to get to Ypres on the previous evening, she thought that perhaps they would help us also for the journey. Dame Teresa offered to accompany her, as, being the niece of Mr. Redmond, it was felt she might be specially useful. So, accompanied by Dame Columban and Dame Patrick, Mother Prioress set out to try to find the officer who had given them seats in his motor the day before. He had said he belonged to the aeroplane encampment, which we knew to be just outside the town. Meeting an English soldier, we asked him to be so kind as to show us the way. On hearing our story, he advised us to apply rather to another officer, who would be better able to help us, and directed us to the convent where this officer was staying. The convent proved to be that of the Penitents of St. Francis, where we received a warm welcome, and were introduced to two nuns from the Hospice of Ypres who had taken refuge there. The captain in question was not in; so the nuns insisted on our seeing their lovely little church and sacristy, after which they found a soldier who conducted us to the British Headquarters which were then actually at Poperinghe. There we were received with the greatest courtesy by Captain Liddell who promised to do everything in his power to help us, but advised us, at the same time, to apply to Commandant Delporte, of the Belgian Constabulary, who would be better able than he to find a train to convey us to Dunkerque or Boulogne.

We thanked the captain, and left to find the Belgian police station. Having been directed several different ways, we eventually arrived at our destination, and were received by an official who promised to acquaint the

Commandant with the reason of our visit as soon as he should return, he being absent at the moment. We were about to leave, when the door opened and M. le Commandant Delporte entered, and after courteously saluting us, he begged us to take seats, and showed the greatest interest in all that Mother Prioress related. He then said that a train of refugees had left only the day before, and he could not tell us when another would start. He referred us again to the general staff, saying that, as we were British subjects, they ought certainly to take us either in their ambulance cars or in a train for the wounded on account of Our Lady Abbess who was paralysed, adding that he would speak in our favour. We therefore turned our steps once more to where we had come from, and having made known the result of our visit, we were told to return the next day at 1.30 P.M., before which time Captain Liddell would consult the Chief Medical Officer, and see what could be done for us. We then took the road back to the convent, where we were glad to find a warm shelter.

The next day was Friday. Captain Liddell had promised to call on us, should anything be decided before 1.30. The town was, however, suddenly thrown into a state of excitement by the passing of a German Taube which dropped a bomb on St. Bertin's Church. Fortunately it only slightly injured the porch, though it wounded several persons standing by. Amongst the injured was the chaplain of La Sainte Union, whose hand was hurt. We were next informed that the British Headquarters had left the town. What then would become of the arrangements for our journey to England? Immediately Dame Columban and Dame Patrick offered to go and see if any message had been left for us, poor Mother Prioress being unwell, and therefore not able to go herself. The narrative is again continued from the notes of Dame Columban and Dame Patrick:—

'Having received Mother Prioress' blessing, we started off, wondering what we should find, perhaps an empty house? On our way we passed St. Bertin's Church, where a group of persons were gathered, watching French soldiers clearing the road of the remains of bricks, stones, glass, which were strewn about. Every window in the whole street was broken. Hastening our steps we were soon in presence of Captain Liddell, to whom we apologised for our early call, relating what we had heard. He said that the staff had no intention of leaving as yet, that as to our journey it would take several days to arrange, for different persons would have to be consulted. The situation did not seem very satisfactory, so, on taking our leave, we determined to have recourse once more to the Belgian authorities. Just as we arrived in sight of the building, to our great disappointment, we saw the Commandant leaving in company with two British officers. We immediately drew back, but, recognising us, he came forward, all three officers giving a military salute. We begged him not to stop for us, saying that we would call again, but he insisted on bringing us into the house, telling the officers he would rejoin them shortly. We stated, as briefly as possible, the unsatisfactory result of our visit to the English Headquarters, and asked what was the best thing to do. He told us that there was a train leaving the next day at 2.30 P.M., but that in all probability we should not enjoy the company. We, of course, declared that this did not matter. However, he told us to decide nothing as yet, saying he himself would go to arrange with the British officers, and would call on Mother Prioress next morning. We thanked him profusely, and once more turned our steps towards La Sainte Union to acquaint Reverend Mother with the result of our negotiations.'

CHAPTER X

A SECOND ATTEMPT TO REVISIT YPRES

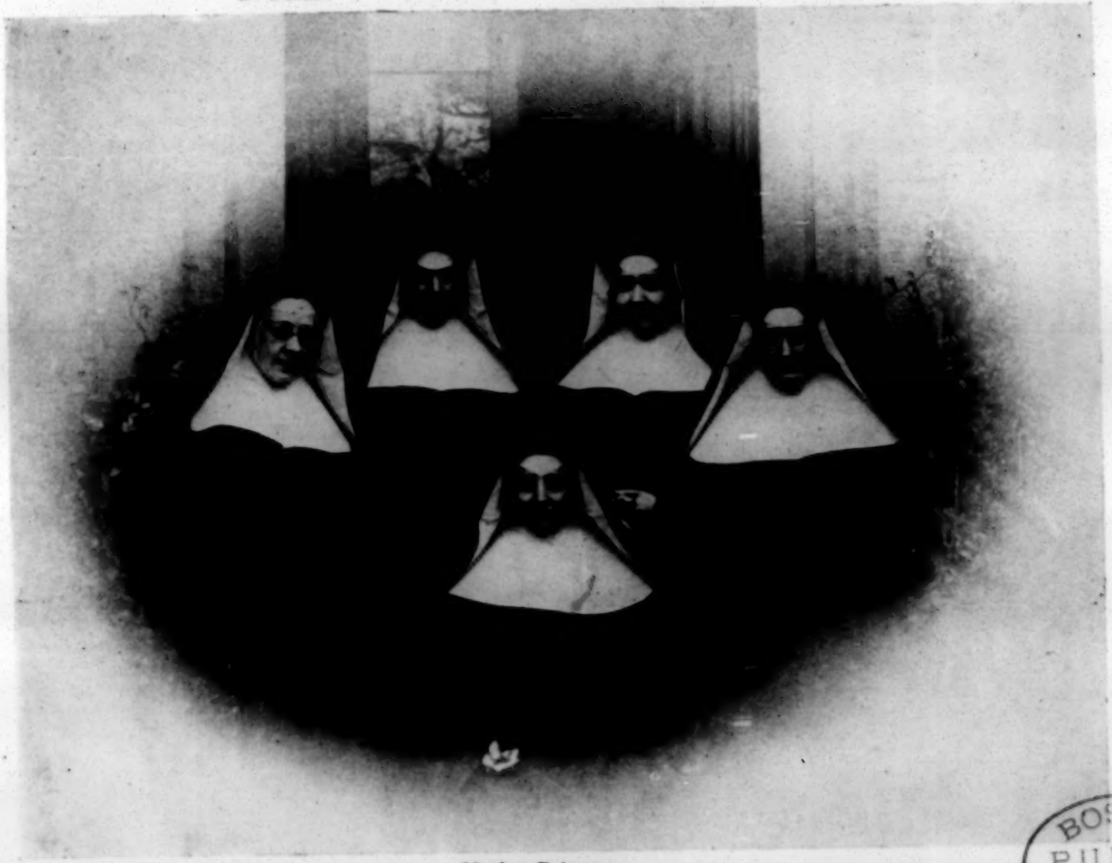
WERE we, then, to leave Belgium without seeing our beloved monastery again? The thought was too dreadful. This time Dame Placid begged to be allowed to venture back, and asked Dame Columban and Dame Patrick if they would go with her. They at once agreed; and having begged a blessing from Mother Prioress, started off, accompanied by the two servants of Madame Boone, poor Mother Prioress being still unwell and quite unable to accompany them, to her great disappointment. Dame Columban and Dame Patrick will again tell the story.

'We were now *determined* to succeed—it was our last chance.

'We had not gone far, when the whirr of an aeroplane was heard overhead. It flew too low to be an enemy, so we wished it good-speed, and passed on. Shortly after, some fugitives met us, who, seeing the direction we were taking, stared aghast, and told us that the Germans were bombarding Ypres worse than ever. Should we turn back? Oh no! it was our *last* chance. We continued bravely. Soon, others stopped us with the same story, but, turning a deaf ear to the horrors they related, we pushed on. Over an hour had passed, when, after a brisk walk, Vlamertinghe came in sight. More than half our journey was accomplished. Just as we approached the railway station (we had again taken the railway track) we heard the whirr of an aeroplane, then a volley of shots flew up towards the aeroplane. We knew what that meant. We could see the shots of the Allies bursting in the air, some near the Taube, some far away; alas! none hit it. What should we do? We determined to risk it; and passing under Taube, bombs, shots, and all, we hastened through the railway station—soldiers, men, women and children staring at "these strange Benedictine nuns!"

'Hurrying on, we met two priests coming from Ypres. We stopped to ask advice.

D. Teresa. D. Placid. D. Columban. D. Patrick.



Mother Prioress.

The Mother Prioress, Dame Teresa, and the Three Nuns who revisited Ypres.

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They told us that our undertaking was decidedly dangerous. There was hardly a person left in the town; they had gone in in the morning to see if they could be of any use, and were now leaving, not daring to stop the night. They told us that there was still one priest who remained in the establishment of the mad people, just outside Ypres, and that we could always call on him, if we could not manage to reach our convent; but they added that he also was leaving the next day with all his poor protégés. We made up our minds to risk all; so, asking the priests' blessing, we went our way. Other people tried in vain to make us turn back, especially two men who assured us we should never be able to accomplish our project. We thanked them for the interest they showed in our behalf, and asked them if they would be so kind as to call at the convent at Poperinghe and tell Mother Prioress not to be anxious if we did not return that night, and not to expect us till the next day. We were now approaching the crossroads which had proved so fatal on Wednesday. A Belgian officer on a bicycle stopped to ask where we were going. We told him. He said it was simple madness to think of doing such a thing. He had been with his soldiers trying to mend the roads a little farther on, and had been obliged to leave off on account of the shells which were flying in all directions. We thanked him, but said we would risk it all the same. Arriving on the high road, we soon found ourselves in presence of a French policeman who asked where we were going. "To Ypres!" was the determined reply. "No one can pass. You must go back." What were we to do? We determined to go on. Were there no means of getting in by another way? While we stood as though rooted to the ground, we caught sight of a French Chasseur on the other side of the road, who seemed to have some authority, and who was trying to console a woman and two weeping children. We immediately applied to him, and told him our distress. He answered kindly, but told us, all the same, that he was afraid we should not be able to enter Ypres. We begged to be allowed to continue, if only to *try*. He smiled and said: "If you *really* wish it, then pass on." And on his writing down a passport, we went on triumphantly. It seemed as though God were helping us.

'We had been so taken up with all that had passed that we had thought of nothing else, but now that we were in sight of the goal we realised that it was freezing hard. The stars were shining brightly, from time to time a light flashed in the distance, then a sinister whirr, followed by an explosion, which told us that the Germans were not going to let us pass as easily as did the French Chasseur. Wondering as to how we should succeed, we came across an English sentinel, and so asked his advice. He told us that he thought there was no chance whatever of our getting into the town. He said that he himself had been obliged to abandon his post on account of the shells, that the troops in the town had been ordered to leave, and that those coming in had been stopped. (We now remembered having seen a regiment of French soldiers setting out from Poperinghe at the same time as we had done, and then they were suddenly stopped, while we went on and saw them no more.) Despite what the sentinel told us, we remained unpersuaded. Seeing several soldiers going in and out of a house just opposite, we thought it would be as well to ask a temporary shelter till the bombardment should lessen. We ventured to ask admission, when what was our surprise to receive the warmest of welcomes and the kindest offers of hospitality. We could not have found a better spot. The family was thoroughly Christian; and, in this time of distress, the door of the house stood open day and night for all who were in need. How much more for nuns, and more especially enclosed nuns like ourselves! They had seen us passing on our way to Poperinghe, just a fortnight before, and had accompanied our wanderings with a prayer. A few days ago they had also given refreshment to the Poor Clares who had taken refuge at Vlamertinghe; and now their only desire was that God would spare their little house, that they might continue their deeds of mercy and true charity. To give us pleasure, they introduced an Irish gentleman who was stopping with them, since the Germans had chased him out of Courtrai. A lively conversation soon began, while the good woman of the house prepared us a cup of hot coffee and some bread and butter. After this, the Irish gentleman, whose name was Mr. Walker, went out to investigate, to see if it would not be possible for us to continue our walk. After about half an hour's absence, during which we were entertained by our host (M. Vanderghote, 10 Chaussée de Poperinghe, Ypres), who made his five children and two nieces come in to say good-night to us before going to bed, Mr. Walker returned, saying it was a sheer impossibility to enter the town that evening, as the shells were falling at the rate of two every three minutes. He had called on M. l'Abbé Neuville, the priest above mentioned, Director of the Asylum, who said he would give us beds for the night, and then we could assist at his Mass at 6.30 next morning. The latter part of the proposition we gladly accepted; but as to the first, we were afraid of abusing his goodness, and preferred, if our first benefactor would consent, to remain where we were until morning. Our host was only too pleased, being sorry that he could not provide us with beds. He then forced us to accept a good plate of warm butter-milk; after which, provided with blankets and shawls, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could for the night. Needless to say, we did not sleep very well and were entertained, till early morning, with explosions of bombs and shells, and the replying fire of the Allies' guns. Once a vigorous rattling of the door-handle aroused us, but we were soon reassured by hearing M. Vanderghote inviting the poor half-frozen soldier, who had thus disturbed us, to go to the kitchen to take something warm. Before 6, we began to move, and performed our ablutions as best we could. The eldest son of the family now came to fetch us, to show us the way to the church of the asylum, where we had the happiness of hearing Holy Mass and receiving Holy Communion. When Mass was over we wound our way once more through the dimly-lit cloisters of the asylum, while we could not help smiling at the apparent appropriateness of the place we had chosen with the foolhardy act we were undertaking—of risking our lives in thus entering a town which even our brave troops had been obliged to evacuate.

'Once outside the asylum, we found Mr. Walker waiting for us, with the eldest daughter and three sons of M. Vanderghote, who were pushing a hand-cart. We set off at a brisk pace along the frozen road. Passing by a few French soldiers, who looked amazed at our apparition, we soon entered the doomed town. There, a truly heart-breaking sight awaited us. Broken-down houses, whose tottering walls showed remains of what had once been spacious rooms—buildings, half-demolished, half-erect, —met our wondering gaze everywhere. Windows, shattered in a thousand pieces, covered the ground where we walked; while, in the empty casements, imagination pictured the faces of hundreds of starving, homeless poor, whose emaciated features seemed to cry to heaven for vengeance on the heartless invaders of their peaceful native land.

'But we durst not stop; the thought ever uppermost in our hearts was our own beloved Abbey. How should we find it? We pushed on as quickly as we could, but the loose stones, bricks, beams and glass made walking a difficult matter, and twice, having passed half-way down a street, we were obliged to retrace our steps, owing to the road being entirely blocked by overthrown buildings. Here and there, we saw some poor creature looking half-frightened, half-amazed at seeing us, while suddenly turning a corner we came to a pool of frozen water, where three street boys were amusing themselves sliding on the ice. Their mirth seemed almost blameful among so many trophies of human misery! We now came in sight of St. Peter's Church, which at first glance appeared untouched; but coming round, past the calvary, we saw that the porch had been struck.

'One moment more, and we were in La Rue St. Jacques—nay, in front of our dear old home. The pavements were covered with débris of all kinds, but the other buildings had largely contributed to the pile. We hardly dared to raise our eyes; yet the Monastery was there as before, seemingly untouched, save for the garrets over the nuns' cells, where the shell had burst before we had left. We were now greeted by a familiar voice, and looking round found the poor girl, Hélène, who was anxiously enquiring if we were returning to the convent. But there was no time to waste. The Germans, who had stopped bombarding Ypres at about 3 A.M., might recommence at any moment, and then we should have to fly; so we went to the door of the Director's house to try to get into the Abbey. What was our astonishment to find Oscar, our old servant-man, there. Probably he was still more astonished than we, for he had never dared to come to the convent since he had left, and would surely feel, at the least, uncomfortable at our unexpected arrival. However, it was certainly not the moment to think of all these things, so we went in. The whole building seemed but one ruin. In the drawing-room, where the priest's breakfast things—laid a fortnight before—were still on the table, the ceiling was literally on the floor; the staircase was quite blocked with cement, mortar, wall-paper, and bricks; the sacristy, where we were assembled when the first shell fell, was untouched. The church, except for some five or six holes in the roof, was as we left it; but the altar, stripped of all that had once made it so dear to us, spoke volumes to our aching hearts. Mounting the seven steps which led into the choir, we found ourselves once more in that beloved spot. The windows on the street side were in atoms; otherwise, all was intact. Our dearest Lord had watched over His House, His Royal State Chamber, where He was always ready to hold audience with His Beloved Spouses. We tore ourselves away, and flew to secure our breviaries, great-habits, and other things which the other nuns had recommended to us. Everywhere we went, dust and dirt covered the rooms, while a great many windows were broken. The statues of Our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph were unharmed, as also those of Our Holy Father St. Benedict and our Holy Mother St. Scholastica. Little Jesus of Prague had His crown at His feet, instead of on His head; one crucifix was broken in two! The cells were almost quite destroyed, big holes in the ceilings, the windows broken, the plaster down, frozen pools of water on the floor. We hastened to the garrets, where things were still worse. The roof in this part was completely carried away, leaving full entrance to hail, snow, and rain; strong rafters and beams, which seemed made to last unshaken till the end of the world, were rent asunder or thrown on the floor; the huge iron weights of the big clock had rolled to the other end of the garrets; the scene of destruction seemed complete. We turned away; the other part looked secure, the apples and pears lying rotting away on the floors, where we had put them to ripen. In the noviceship, the ceiling was greatly damaged; whilst down in the cloisters, by the grotto of our Lady of Lourdes, a bomb had perforated the roof, the grotto remaining untouched. These seemed to be the principal effects of the invaders' cruelty, as far as our Abbey was concerned.

'We now came across our old carpenter, who had also come into the house with Oscar, and who had already put up planks on the broken windows in the choir, promising to do all he could to preserve the building. He also told us that one of the biggest German bombs had fallen in the garden, but had not exploded, so the French police had been able to take it away—another mark of God's loving care over us; for, had the bomb burst, it would have utterly destroyed our Monastery. We were now obliged to leave. When should we see the dear old spot again? and in what state would it be if we ever did return?'

CHAPTER XI

THE RETURN JOURNEY TO POPERINGHE

'The hand-cart being overloaded, we had to carry some of the things ourselves; and we must have looked a strange sight, carrying books and clothes, stuffed in white pillow-cases—even Mr. Walker had one, which he hoisted on his shoulder. We did not trouble about this, but silently made our way back, through the deserted streets. We left the town by a different way from that by which we had entered it, as a sinister boom from the station warned us of the presence of the enemy. Our road took us this time through the Grand' Place. The whole back part of the hospital was destroyed; and although the walls of the façade were still standing, one could see, through the empty windows, that the interior was almost entirely demolished. The Cloth Hall, also, had not been spared, one corner being severely damaged, and the greater number of the statues maimed and mutilated. If it could have remained so, there might have been some consolation; but now everyone knows the ruthless barbarity which has prompted the Huns of the twentieth century to utterly destroy this wonderful monument of medieval architecture, of which Ypres had been so justly proud during hundreds of years. It appears that the belfry, the chimes of which were only surpassed by those of Bruges and Antwerp, was struck just twenty-four hours after we had passed it on our exit from the town. St. Martin's, too, had also been struck. We would, nevertheless, have entered, but Mr. Walker was afraid to let us prolong our stay, as the shells were already flying over us. Our thoughts naturally turned to the much revered and esteemed M. le Doyen, who, victim of his heroic courage, had remained at his post to the last, tending the wounded, and even helping to extinguish the fires which the incendiary bombs caused in so many places; till at last, seeing the interior of his beloved church already in flames, he had fallen, struck down by a cerebral congestion, and had been carried to the Dean of Poperinghe in the ambulance car. (Since, we have heard that he is better, D. G., one of our old pupils having seen him in the church at Poperinghe.)

'On emerging from the town, a little incident occurred.

'We came up with a British cavalry regiment. They were coming from the trenches. They looked at us and shouted: "Who are you, Sisters, and where do you come from?" Dame Columban answered: "We are English nuns from the Benedictine Convent of the Rue St. Jacques." This was too much for Dame Patrick, who called out: "We are no such thing. We are *Irish* Benedictines!" "Irish!" shouted half a dozen of them, "and so are we," and they all began singing, "It's a long way to Tipperary," and, thus escorted, we took a long, last look at the dear old town. Needless to say, it was an Irish regiment—every man wore the harp and shamrock on his collar and cap.

'We soon arrived at the house where we had taken refuge during the night, and were not sorry to have a good cup of coffee and some bread and butter and jam. Mr. Walker had told us of some of his experiences, among which was the burning of Madame la Baronne Coppens' house, this lady being the mother of one of our former pupils. M. Vanderghote's eldest son had been left in charge of their house, sleeping in the cellar at night. On one occasion when the bombardment was raging fiercely, Mr. Walker had offered to accompany him. They kept watch in turns. As Mr. Walker was sleeping, the son woke him suddenly crying out, "Quick! get up! the house is on fire!" Half-dazed, he had seized hold of his candlestick and followed the son to the door. All was in flames. They turned back, half-stifled with the smoke, but could find no exit. At last they managed to break the glass of the window, and jumping out, just escaped from the place as, with a loud crash, the roof fell in. Mr. Walker had his candlestick still in his hand, which he showed us among pieces of shrapnel and shells, all souvenirs of the war. They had also saved the dog, which was slightly burnt.

'We now hurried the preparations for our departure, as time was passing quickly, and we had still a long walk before us. Our kind host accompanied us as far as the cross-roads where the French police mounted guard, for he was not allowed farther. By a strange coincidence we met once more the Belgian officer who had seen us the evening before. He was more than astonished at what we had done, and was very pleased that all had succeeded so well. We thanked Monsieur Vanderghote warmly for all that he had done for us, promising that, if it were possible, we should assuredly call on him on our return to Ypres. We then set off, two of us pushing the cart. We had taken but a few steps, when a French official stopped us once more, saying that no carts were allowed on the high-road, except those belonging to the army. We had therefore to take a country lane, which had the double inconvenience of being twice as long as the straight road and, indeed, of being also almost impassable. However, there was nothing to be done but to go forward as best we could ; so off we went. Oh dear ! One wanted Goliath's strength to push the cart over the stones and ruts. After a few yards we came to a dead stop. The cart was stuck. We pushed and pushed with might and main—vain efforts. We could not move it. We were finally obliged to pull backwards, and thus managed to extricate it. Taught by experience, we took more care next time, looking where we were going to; so things went pretty well for about a hundred paces, when, glancing behind us, what was our dismay to see a number of French soldiers coming by the same road, some on horseback, others on foot, others driving carts. There was only the narrow lane in front of us, with no means of turning visible to the right or left. What *was* to be done ? We hurried on as best we could, but what was the use ?—in ten minutes they would surely overtake us. At last, turning round a corner, what was our relief to see an open gateway leading into a farmyard. We boldly pushed our precious load in, thus leaving room for the soldiers to pass. We then tried if it were possible to find some one to help us ; because, judging from the difficulties we had met with so far, it was really questionable if we should arrive at Poperinghe before evening. After grumbling a bit, two men offered to come with us as far as Vlamertinghe. This was better than nothing ; and, as we followed them, we fervently prayed that we should meet with some one else later on.

'On we trudged, wondering what had happened in the convent since our departure. What if the Belgian Commandant had found a train, and everyone had been obliged to leave without us! No, surely that was not possible. We passed soldiers, men, women, children, wading through pools of mud and water, and lamenting our long detour, which had made us waste so much precious time. Vlamertinghe at last—still five long miles to Poperinghe—should we *ever* get there? On arriving at the village, our two good fellows set about finding some one else to push our cart, and finally succeeded. Having paid them, we set off once more on our journey, when behold! a barrier was placed across the road, and we had to come to a standstill. They told us a train was coming. We looked and looked, but saw no sign of it in either direction. Meanwhile a crowd of people assembled, who, accustomed to such proceedings, pushed past, right up to the railing, to be the first to pass, and we were left at the back. We waited and waited, still no train. What a waste of time!

Then came the sound of horses' hoofs, and up trotted a whole regiment of soldiers, who, of course, rode to the front, pushing the crowd back, and us along with them. Still no train! We now happened to look across to the other side of the barrier, and discovered another regiment, waiting on the opposite side, with again a crowd of people behind them. Should we ever get through? Still no train! Decidedly, the good man's watch must have been considerably in advance, or else he possessed the virtue of prudence in its highest perfection. At length a feeble whistle told us that the long-expected locomotive was coming. But it must have been a train of wounded soldiers; for first it moved forward at a snail's pace, and secondly it seemed, to our worn-out patience, to be at least one mile in length. However, it passed at last; and, the barriers being withdrawn, the two regiments crossed four abreast, then the crowds pushed through, and last but not least came the representatives of the Irish Benedictine Abbey, with their stylish-looking hand-cart. Once more, on we pushed; but the five miles must have been German ones, which, like their dreadful soldiers, never come to an end.

'Our guide kept bravely on, from time to time stopping to wipe the perspiration off his face; for, although it was freezing, the poor fellow had no light work to try to advance through the mud and dirt. At last, passing by some houses, he left the cart in the middle of the road, and vanished. The reason soon became evident, for a moment afterwards he came out with a glass of foaming beer, wherewith to refresh himself. Once again, on we went. Would the road ever come to an end? Would we ever arrive at our destination? We scanned the horizon to find some vestige of our approaching goal, but could discover nothing but an endless succession of trees, hop-gardens, fields. Finally, however, some houses came in sight, so plucking up our courage, we pushed forward, and soon reached the convent door. At last we should get a rest. Alas, how we were deceiving ourselves! Once inside, we were soon surrounded by our Sisters, one more anxious than the other to know what had happened, and to tell us what had been decided during our absence. Parcels of every shape and dimension next met our eyes. Arrived at the room which we generally occupied, what was our astonishment to find dear Lady Abbess downstairs, surrounded by the nuns of both communities. On catching sight of us, she was more than delighted. We knelt for her blessing, and to tell her some of our adventures, and then learnt the reason of all this excitement.'

Mother Prioress will now tell what happened during the absence of Dame Columban, Dame Patrick, and Dame Placid.

'As soon as the three nuns had set out for Ypres, we went to the chapel to recommend them to the protection of God, and by a fervent "Sub tuum" we commended them to the care of the Blessed Virgin. They had promised me to be back if possible that night, or at least the next morning, if they could remain in the convent cellars without too much danger. At 3 P.M. I was called to see Captain Liddell, who told me that the British Headquarters would place two ambulance cars at our disposal to conduct Lady Abbess and the community to St. Omer. The cars would be ready between ten and eleven next morning. He also said that, once at St. Omer, I had only to address myself to the mayor, or to the general staff. I thanked him profusely, and told him of my anxiety for the three nuns who had gone to Ypres. " It was a very imprudent thing to attempt," he answered. " I trust they will not be allowed to enter the town, for it is being fiercely shelled." I was very alarmed, as were the rest of the community, to whom I related what the captain had said. In the evening, we were assembled with the nuns from Oostmieunkerke in the big parlour, which the Superioress had kindly allotted for our use. The gas being cut off, we had only one pétrole lamp between us. We spent our time working and praying.

' From time to time, on hearing a ring at the bell, we would ask if the nuns had yet come back; one of the younger nuns would go and enquire, but always returned disappointed. We looked at each other anxiously. What would become of them this night ? We could only recommend them to God. Suddenly I had an inspiration.

"Let us put them under the protection of St. Raphael," I said, "and promise him a Mass to-morrow—there are several priests at the ambulance, one of them will surely be free to say it." Everyone was pleased with the idea, and Dame Teresa went to make enquiries. She soon came back in triumph, saying that the priest from Avignon was outside. We told him our distress, and respectfully begged him to be so kind as to say the Mass in honour of St. Raphael for the safe return of our three absent ones. He willingly agreed. At the same moment the appearance of the portress brought the cry to our lips: "They are there!" "No! it is the Commandant Delporte, of the Belgian police, who wishes to speak to Mother Prioress." I went to the parlour, fear and hope alternately taking possession of my heart. He came to ask if Captain Liddell had called, and if the decision of the Headquarters suited us. I told him of the arrangement and added, "Once at St. Omer, what shall I do with our honoured Lady Abbess? May she remain in the motor, which they say must return to Poperinghe that evening, while I go to the mayor and general staff ? " He reflected a moment, and then, taking one of his cards, he wrote a few words recommending us to Major Kirke. " Take this," he said, rising, " and give it to the major, who is a great friend of mine, and rest assured that all will be well." I could not thank him enough, and conducted him to the door. There I found myself in presence of two men, who asked to see me. They brought me a message from our nuns, telling me not to be anxious ; they would not return that night, but the next day, as soon as possible. I felt a little relieved, but again the question presented itself, at what hour would they arrive ? Would they be in time ? The next morning we arranged our modest parcels, which—thanks to the dexterity of Dame Aloysius—were soon ready, thinking all the time of our missing Sisters. For my part, I went to prepare Lady Abbess for our departure, for the hour was fast approaching. We must come to a decision—the three must remain at La Sainte Union until the opportunity of joining us in England should present itself. We had now to get Lady Abbess down the stairs which were narrow and steep, and it was with the greatest difficulty that we succeeded. We made her as comfortable as we could in an arm-chair in the big parlour, where the nuns of the three communities gathered round her, for everyone was filled with an affectionate respect for her, mingled with compassion for her age and infirmity. We tried to hide our perplexity and anxiety from her. It was now time to start, and the three were not yet back. At this moment the portress entered the room smiling—what was it ? Captain Liddell had just called to say the motors would not be round till 1.30. "Deo gratias ! " To complete our happiness, the absent ones soon arrived, covered with dust and mud, but producing in triumph the great-habits and breviaries they had been able to save.'

CHAPTER XII

ON THE WAY TO ENGLAND

There was now no time to waste. The few treasures we had brought with us were promptly added to the other packages; while it was decided that each nun should wear her great-habit, as much to lessen the number of parcels, as to preserve us from the cold, especially when crossing the sea. We bade adieu to the Superioress and community of La Sainte Union, who had given us such a warm welcome, and shown us such hospitality during the past fortnight. They asked us in return to beseech Our Lord not to allow the Germans to bombard Poperinghe, that they might be able to stop in their convent, which they had only built during the past eleven years, since the French Government had driven them from Hazebrouck.

A ring at the door interrupted our

adieux. The voice of a British officer was heard, asking if this were the convent where the Irish Dames of Ypres had taken refuge. The answer was soon given; and while some went to help Lady Abbess, others seized the 'baggage,' and all were soon at the door, where a group of wondering children and other people were assembled to see what would be the end of such an unusual sight. The great difficulty was to get our venerable invalid into the car; for although able to walk fairly well when helped on both sides, it was almost impossible for her to mount the two small steps. However, the soldiers soon came to the rescue; and, with the help of their strong arms, she was soon established comfortably in a corner of one of the motors, enveloped in a blanket and numerous shawls to keep out the cold. The rest of the community were not long in getting in the motors, and Edmund brought up the rear with a young Irish girl, Miss Keegan, who had been trying to get home since the war broke out, and had now begged to be allowed to make the journey with us.

Owing to the heavy fall of rain and the

unusual traffic, the roads were in a very bad condition and consequently our ride was not of the smoothest; but no accident occurred. Being frosty weather, the wind was bitterly cold, and we were obliged to keep everything closed that Lady Abbess might not be inconvenienced. She, however, kept up bravely. We did not forget to say the 'Sub tuum,' nor to invoke our good St. Raphael with a fervent 'Angeli, archangeli,' to which we added the prayer for travellers. About half-way our kind guides came round to the entrance of the cars to know if we wanted anything. We passed through several villages and small towns surrounded by snow-covered fields and frozen ponds. Nothing of note happened to vary the monotony of the continual shaking of our motors. A little after 5 P.M. we came to a standstill, and looking out, found ourselves in what seemed to be a good-sized town. We were not left long in suspense, for soon the cheery face of the officer in charge appeared, enquiring where we wished to be driven, for we were at St. Omer. Mother Prioress then produced the letter of recommendation given her by Commandant Delporte for Major Kirke. The officer took the card, and soon we moved off in another direction. After a few minutes' run, we came again to a halt, stopping some time. The officer then reappeared, saying that the major was absent, and asking where we would like to go now. Alas! we did not know, and wondered if it would not be advisable to go straight on to Boulogne that same evening, to take the boat the first thing next morning. The officer, seeing our perplexity, vanished once more. Soon we were bowling through busy streets, lined with shops well lit. Another stop, a few minutes' wait, and off we were again. A third halt—then another officer appeared, saluted, and asked in excellent French if he could render us any service, or replace Major Kirke, who was absent from St. Omer. On hearing our situation, he told us that if we would just step out we should find accommodation in the establishment before which the cars had stopped. As he was still speaking, the persons who kept the house came out, helping us down, taking the parcels from us, and seeming more than delighted at our arrival. We were not sorry to leave the cars, for we were quite cramped with the long, cold drive. The next question was how to get Lady Abbess out of her corner, and into the house. At last the officer in charge had the bright idea of carrying her on a stretcher. Accordingly, one was brought down and laid on the seat opposite. We then helped her to sit on the stretcher, and induced her to lie down. She was at first afraid, not being accustomed to this novel mode of conveyance; but, being reassured, she allowed the soldiers to carry her into the house, and she was soon seated in a comfortable arm-chair by a blazing fire. After expressing our gratitude to the good soldiers, we rejoined Lady Abbess and soon made acquaintance with our kind hostesses. What was our delight to find that they were secularised Ursuline nuns, and that the house had formerly been a convent of La Sainte Union. It is therefore unnecessary to state that we were received with the greatest charity, a bed being even carried down to the room where we were for Lady Abbess, so that she should not be obliged to go upstairs. Poor Edmund had once more to be sent off, being conducted to almost the other end of the town, much to his distress.

After a good supper, we retired to rest in what had once been the children's dormitory, and fatigued by such an eventful day we slept well. Next morning we were awakened by the deep tones of church bells. They were ringing the 6 o'clock Mass in the cathedral, which was quite close to the convent. We arose, and arrived in time for a late Mass. We were shown to seats almost at the top of the church. After a few moments we heard the sound of soldiers marching, and soon we had to give place to them, for we had come to a Military Mass, celebrated by an Army Chaplain. Two by two the soldiers advanced, being marshalled to right and left by an officer. It was an Irish regiment, and there were altogether about seventy soldiers who attended devoutly to Holy Mass, and more than one, when the moment of Holy Communion came, mingled with those who approached the altar. After Mass, we were conducted back to the convent, promising ourselves a visit during the day to see the many objects of devotion and interest in the venerable cathedral. We were not disappointed. Amongst other antiquities is a 'Descent from the Cross' by Rubens, and oil-paintings in memory of a visit which holy King Louis IX and Charles X paid to the cathedral, in thanksgiving for the success of their arms. The sacred vessels, also, were for the most part of great antiquity, especially a very ancient pyx ornamented with filagree work. Besides the high altar, in the middle of the sanctuary, having the stalls for the bishop and canons behind, there were numerous side-altars, among which the most remarkable was that dedicated to Our Blessed Lady of Miracles. This miraculous statue was held in great veneration by the inhabitants of the town; and in the great peril they had gone through some weeks past, when the Germans were advancing on St. Omer, and when the British had saved it by arriving only just in time—for had they come but half an hour later, the enemy would have been before them—in the moment of peril, the people had promised Our Blessed Lady, to give a new bell to the cathedral if she kept the dreaded invaders from entering the city. ‘Ex-votos’ without end hung all round the altar, besides numberless engravings in thanksgiving for miracles and cures obtained through Our Lady’s intercession.

After our interesting visit, we stopped for vespers, which, since the beginning of the War, were sung by the entire congregation; during which time we profited to say our own vespers and compline. We then went to visit M. le Curé de Furnes who, we knew, was stopping at St. Omer, Mother Prioress desiring to have news of her cousin the Dean of Furnes who, we heard, was at Boulogne. We also had the pleasure of saluting M. le Vicaire.

On our way, we met some soldiers from Morocco — easily distinguished as Arabs, by their bright blue tunics and long scarlet cloaks, with their big turbans, their blankets thrown round them, and their lovely horses. When we returned to the house, we learned that Lieutenant Stuart-Hayes, who had been so kind to us on the previous evening, had called to see Reverend Mother. He had, likewise, left a message to say that he would try to assist at Benediction in the evening; and afterwards he would come round again. He would be also very grateful if, before his visit, Mother Prioress would make out all that was necessary for our passports. All being finished, we set out for the cathedral once again; for although there were still twenty minutes before Benediction, yet at St. Omer, as nearly everywhere else, the churches, since the beginning of hostilities, were crowded, and those who before never put their foot inside a church were now amongst the most fervent; so, to secure our places, we had to be there in time. The rosary was first said aloud, the priest ascending the pulpit, so as to be better heard by everyone. After the 'O Salutaris,' repeated alternately by the choir and congregation, the 'Miserere' was sung, the people repeating the first lines between each verse of the Psalm. There was something particularly touching in that cry for mercy which arose from every heart at the thought of the dear ones who, perhaps even at that very moment, were being shot down on the battle-field. But what made the most impression was the hymn sung after Benediction, and which still rings in our ears—that ardent supplication to 'La bonne

Mère ! ' 'Vierge d'espérance, Étends sur nous ton voile ; Sauve, sauve la France ! Ne l'abandonne pas ! ' It was truly a prayer in the real sense of the word, beseeching the Mother of Mercy not to forsake the land she had so many times miraculously saved, and where, but a short while before, had been seen such a wonderful outburst of faith at the Eucharistic Congress of Lourdes—the spot chosen by Our Blessed Lady herself, and where the devotion to the Son had ever been united to that of the Mother. The sound of the grand old organ greatly enhanced the beauty of the singing ; and our hearts also mounted to the throne of mercy in behalf of our well-beloved Abbey which we were now leaving so far behind.

Soon afterwards, returning to our lodgings, Mother Prioress received the promised visit of the lieutenant, accompanied by a military priest. He brought all the necessary papers with him, together with a recommendation for the Governor of Boulogne, and took away our passports to have them signed. Reverend Mother told him she would like so much to have a Mass celebrated the next day in honour of St. Raphael for our safe voyage.

He promised to see if it would be possible; and true enough, he returned a short time after with the good news that not only should we have a Mass said at which we could assist, but that he had obtained permission for the priest to accompany us as far as Boulogne. We were now in jubilation and proceeded once more to arrange our packages. The night soon passed, and next morning we proceeded to the cathedral wondering where we should find ‘ our priest,’ whom we did not know, and had never seen! At the High Altar preparations were being made for a funeral; so we passed to the chapel of Our Lady of Miracles where a Mass was already half finished, hoping that ‘ our priest ’ would perhaps say the next one. Towards the end, he came himself to look for us, and told us he would not be able to come to Our Lady's Altar as all the Masses there were reserved, but that he would commence immediately at St. Antony's. So we crossed over to the other side of the cathedral where Father Flynn (as we afterwards found out he was called) said Mass, at which we all received Holy Communion. After breakfast we made the last preparations; and, about ten, three ambulance cars drove up to the house. The exiled nuns helped us as much as they could, giving us each a postcard with a view of the convent as a souvenir of our visit. They were sorry to see us leave, and told us to be sure and call on them again, if we should ever repass by St. Omer. The soldiers now came in with a stretcher for Lady Abbess; and the nuns were so good that they insisted on lending a mattress, blankets, and pillows, which would be returned with the cars. Having placed Lady Abbess on this portable bed, the soldiers carried her out with the greatest care, Father Flynn presiding and enlivening the whole proceeding with Irish wit. We were soon seated in the cars, but had some time to wait, as Mother Prioress was obliged to get a little money changed. Meanwhile several people came to speak to us, among whom was the sister of one of our former pupils, who, recognising our habit, came forward to know what had happened to the Abbey. After a little while Reverend Mother returned; but still the cars did not start. We soon learnt the reason when Lieutenant Stuart-Hayes appeared triumphantly with a bottle of light wine and a box of biscuits, which he insisted on our accepting. We could not thank him enough for all that he had done for us ; but he withdrew immediately, after making sure we had all we desired, and courteously saluting us, he gave word for the motors to start and we were soon on the road to Boulogne. It was bitterly cold, so we kept the car in which Lady Abbess was lying well covered. Just outside St. Omer, a British aeroplane mounted from the aviation field. This was the last we saw of active hostilities. Father Flynn kept the conversation going, and, between the prayers and hymns, endeavoured to enliven the company. He told us he was the first Catholic Chaplain to arrive with the troops in France. He was going to the front on the following Wednesday—let us hope that he will be spared.

After running along for some time as smoothly as was possible, considering the bad state of the roads, the inmates of one of the motors heard a crack like a report of a revolver. At the same instant the car stood stock-still—the two others following necessarily did likewise. On enquiry, it was discovered that a tyre had burst, which meant a little halt on the way. As we were just outside a village, the inhabitants, though accustomed by this time to British soldiers passing by, were not accustomed to seeing nuns with them and consequently crowded round to examine us a little nearer. None being brave enough to ask where we came from, they solved the problem themselves, and christened us 'Les Petites Sœurs de la Croix Rouge,' a title which I am afraid we hardly deserved.

The country through which we passed seemed very picturesque, judging from the glimpses we got from time to time by lifting up the flap at the end of the car—fields covered with snow gradually sinking in gentle slopes or rising in the distance in hilly ranges. From time to time a woody glade would change the monotony of the succeeding meadows, then a small village with its quaint little houses. As we were thus putting more and more distance between Belgium and ourselves, a sudden crash soon broke the reigning silence. The leading motor having drawn up when at full speed, the two others —not expecting this—had run one on top of the other. We were all thrown over on our seats and so remained, not daring to move, for fear of what might happen next. The truth was that the first car, owing to a rapid run down a slippery hill had charged into a telegraph post, and that was the cause of our being roused so unceremoniously out of the dreams of 'auld lang syne.' The drivers soon appeared to make excuses for the fright they had unwillingly given us, saying that there was no harm done, except for a window broken. We were quite reassured and started off again. Lady Abbess had fortunately not realised the danger, and only asked what the noise meant, and why we had stopped.

We rolled on once more, but our guides soon came to the conclusion that they had mistaken their way; so, consulting their maps, they turned back. Uphill and down again, going at the same flying pace, we at last arrived in the historic old town of Boulogne. There we still continued to mount and descend, for the streets seemed all very steep. It was now between 2.30 and 3 P.M. and the boat would not leave till 4. We decided it would be better to stop in our cars, as it was hardly according to the nature of our vocation to go about sight-seeing, and if we got down we should only stand shivering in the cold.

The motor-car in which were Lady Abbess and Mother Prioress was next driven off to the Governor's house, and having drawn up, Father Flynn alighted to arrange everything for us. We patiently awaited his return, little dreaming of the honour which was being prepared for us, till we saw the Governor coming in person to salute the Superioress. Reverend Mother having returned his greeting, told him of the great kindness we had everywhere received from the British Headquarters, at which he expressed the hope that we would experience the same from the French. He then introduced Lieutenant Treillard, to whom he gave us in charge, with directions to see us all safely on board. With truly French gallantry the lieutenant saluted the company, and Father Flynn carefully pocketing his precious papers and jumping up by the chauffeur, the car with Lady Abbess and Mother Prioress rejoined the rest of the community.

Our conductors, who were evidently

hungry, now produced bread, tinned meat, and cheese. One, buying some potato chips, promptly came to share them with us. We declined to accept them, thanking him all the same for his kindness. We thought we could not do better than follow their example; so Mother Prioress divided Lieutenant Stuart-Hayes' biscuits among us. Father Flynn produced a packet of chocolate, and then each in turn drank some wine from the solitary little mug we had brought in case Lady Abbess should want anything on the way. As the soldiers seemed very cold, stamping their feet on the frozen road, Reverend Mother gave them also a drop of wine; and for one who refused (having probably taken the pledge) she warmed some milk with the little spirit-lamp we had. They were all delighted. Poor fellows! it was the least we could do for them, when they had rendered us such good service.

Captain Dwyer, who had brought our papers from the general staff to Lieutenant Stuart-Hayes when we were at St. Omer, now joined us once more (having been sent to Boulogne with despatches) to assure himself of our safety. Our long stay ended by exciting the curiosity of the bystanders, and we received rather indiscreet visits of persons who, apparently passing innocently by the cars, lifted up the flap to look in. Some ventured to talk, and we discovered one poor man who said he came from the Rue St. Jacques, Ypres, and an old woman who had walked all the way from Dixmude.

At last it was time to go on board the boat. The ambulance cars took us quite close to the gangway. When we had all got down with our parcels, the soldiers lifted the stretcher on which Lady Abbess was lying, and gently carried her on board and into the cabin, where we helped her on to a sofa. Lieutenant Treillard superintended everything, and good Father Flynn made fun all the time. The latter then gave special injunctions to Reverend Mother about the papers, &c., and giving us his blessing, with a special one to Lady Abbess, having in his turn begged hers, with all possible wishes for a safe arrival at our destination, he hurried off the boat, which was preparing to leave. The passage was very calm, but cold and frosty. For more than one of us it was the first crossing, Lady Abbess having up to this time never even seen the sea; and, sad to say, nearly all proved 'bad sailors' except, curiously enough, Lady Abbess. Happily, however, the passage only lasted 1 hr. 20 min., so we were soon at Folkestone. Thanks to our papers from British and French Headquarters, we were passed successfully by the doctor and other officials (who stopped two Belgian peasants following us ashore)—even Edmund got through without the least difficulty. Arrived in the station, a telegram was sent to a relative of one of the community in London, who kindly looked out lodgings for us in advance. It seemed an interminable time before the train set off, and afterwards, rushing through the darkness, passing station after station, town after town, we thought London would never come. However, all things come to an end, and so did our journey, as at last we steamed into Victoria Station. There, one would have said we were expected, we were so kindly received by the ladies on the platform, who helped us out and pressed us to take something. On hearing where we had come from, and how we had succeeded in getting honoured Lady Abbess safe through so many difficulties, everyone was more than interested; and soon porters were running in all directions to get cabs to convey us to our destination which was in quite another part of London. A bath-chair was brought for Lady Abbess who was wheeled out of the station, Mother Prioress holding her hand. One of the ladies, seeing the impossibility of getting her into a cab, fetched a private motor-car. The gentleman who owned it, helped by a soldier, lifted Lady Abbess gently in. Then they drove to the hospital of SS. John and Elizabeth, whither it was thought better for the present to take Lady Abbess. The soldier, overcome by the sight of our dear Abbess' patience, took her in his arms—exclaiming, when he came downstairs, 'I could not help it, she is such a dear good old lady.' Dame Patrick's aunt (Mrs. Jessop) had arranged everything for us, and so Dame Patrick, with Mother Prioress and Dame Columban, were cordially received at her house. Lady Abbess remained at the hospital of SS. John and Elizabeth, where, indeed, she received every attention, together with seven other members of the community. Dame Teresa, Dame Aloysius, and Dame Walburge experienced the same charity at the Sisters of Hope. Edmund was also taken in at Mrs. Jessop's. Those at the hospital and the Sisters of Hope heard Mass there next morning; and Mother Prioress, Dame Columban, and Dame Patrick walked as far as the Dominicans at Haverstock Hill. We may here note the loving goodness of Divine Providence, which had not once allowed us to miss Mass or Holy Communion in spite of all the dangers and fatigues of the past weeks. We were truly like the Israelites in the desert, for whom the manna never failed.

CHAPTER XIII

OULTON

NEXT morning we were all motored from our different lodgings to Euston Station, where we were met by Mr. Nolan, brother of Rev. Dom Nolan, O.S.B., and at 10.30 we entered on the last stage of our never-to-be-forgotten journey. We had three reserved compartments at our disposal, by the kind intervention of a gentleman at Victoria Station, who had given a signed card to Mother Prioress, telling her to show it to anyone who should question her. And so we travelled safely from Ypres to Oulton. How strange it seemed, for more than one of us, to pass by those scenes which we had thought never more to see in this life! We had left our country, home, and all, to shut ourselves up in the peaceful solitude of Ypres Abbey; and here we were, forced to retrace our steps and to return temporarily to the world which we had willingly given up. God was, however, preparing us another place of refuge from the turmoil of Babylon, into which we had suddenly been thrown.

After changing trains at Stafford, where Lady Abbess experienced the same considerate compassion which had been shown to her all along, we arrived at Stone Station. There we were met by some of the pupils of Oulton Abbey, who told us how everyone was expecting us, and how they had tried during the past weeks to obtain news of us, but always unsuccessfully. Two Dominican nuns from the Stone Convent next came forward to greet us, one being an old Princethorpian school-companion of Dame Columban and Dame Teresa.

The carriages awaiting us were soon full, and as there was not room for all, four of us offered to walk. We lost nothing by this; for passing by Stone, the two Dominican nuns who had so kindly come to the station to meet us, obtained permission for us to visit their convent. We went all round the church (the community were singing vespers in their choir) and then through the cloisters, which reminded us of the dear Abbey we had left behind. We saw the community room and several others, and lastly found ourselves in the parlour, where we awaited the honoured visit of Reverend Mother Prioress. We passed an agreeable time, till the sound of carriage wheels told us that one of the vehicles which had already been up to Oulton had returned to fetch us.

Our honoured Lady Abbess and the community were received with open arms at St. Mary's Abbey. It was with true motherly affection that Lady Laurentia opened the doors of her Monastery to receive the Ypres community. The two communities—Oulton and Ypres—have always been closely united, and one of the first thoughts of the Oulton nuns, on the outbreak of this dreadful war in Belgium, was for the Abbey at Ypres. As early as September 17 the Lady Abbess had written and offered us a home, in case we had to leave our Monastery; but for some weeks we had refused to believe that this would ever happen.

When we arrived we found the Lady Abbess and community assembled to receive us, and also the chaplain, Monsignor Schobel. who was no stranger, as he had often visited us at Ypres when staying with his friends at Bruges. We were very pleased to see him again.

By degrees we learned the trouble we had unwittingly caused the nuns; for a letter which Mother Prioress had written five days before, from Poperinghe, to announce our arrival had only come that morning, and the telegram from London had followed almost immediately. Everyone had been obliged to set to work to prepare for our accommodation. Two large rooms were placed at Lady Abbess' service. There were only two cells free, so one was allotted to Mother Prioress, and the other to Dame Placid. The rest of the choir dames were comfortably established in a dormitory of the new building only completed since the month of October. The lay-sisters found beds in another large room, and so our wanderings came to an end.

No one save those who have suffered as we have suffered can realise the joy which we experienced in finding ourselves once more in the calm and quiet of monastic life, where Holy Mass and Communion, the singing of the Divine Office, meditation and spiritual reading, succeeding the varied duties of the day, tend to soften the memories of the scenes of bloodshed and wretchedness which can never be forgotten.

Yet the echoes of this war of horrors reach us, even in our haven of rest. As I write, news reaches us from our chaplain (Monsieur de Seagher, Principal du Collège Episcopal, Ypres) who has returned to Ypres to find his college entirely pillaged and almost in ruins. He says that a third of the population has already re-entered the town; all are in dismay at the heart-rending sight which meets their gaze. As to our convent, he writes: 'The state of your Abbey is also deplorable. The shells have made great havoc there. The French soldiers occupy it at present. In several places the water is rising in the cellars. God alone knows what we shall still see, for the bombardment is not yet finished.'

And now, what has God in store for us? We know not! When shall we return to brave little Belgium, and how shall we rebuild our monastery which, as has been said, should this very year celebrate its 250th anniversary ? God, in His own good time, will raise up kind friends who will come to our assistance—of this we cannot doubt. In confidence, patience, and prayer we shall therefore await the moment chosen by Him Who has said: 'Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things [*i.e.* temporal gifts] shall be added to you.'

Meanwhile we beg the Father of Mercy and the God of all Consolation to have pity on the world, and put an end to the dreadful punishment which weighs so heavily on our unfortunate generation. May He enlighten our enemies, that, realising the injustice of their cause, they may be converted, and cease their cruelties. May He also, in His infinite goodness, purge the entire universe from the crimes which have degraded humanity and brought it down to the level of ancient paganism, so that all, seeking only His greater honour and glory, may unite in the canticle of praise which Holy Church places on our lips during the

Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and which first resounded on Bethlehem's plains round the crib of our common Redeemer:—

'Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.'

THE END

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